



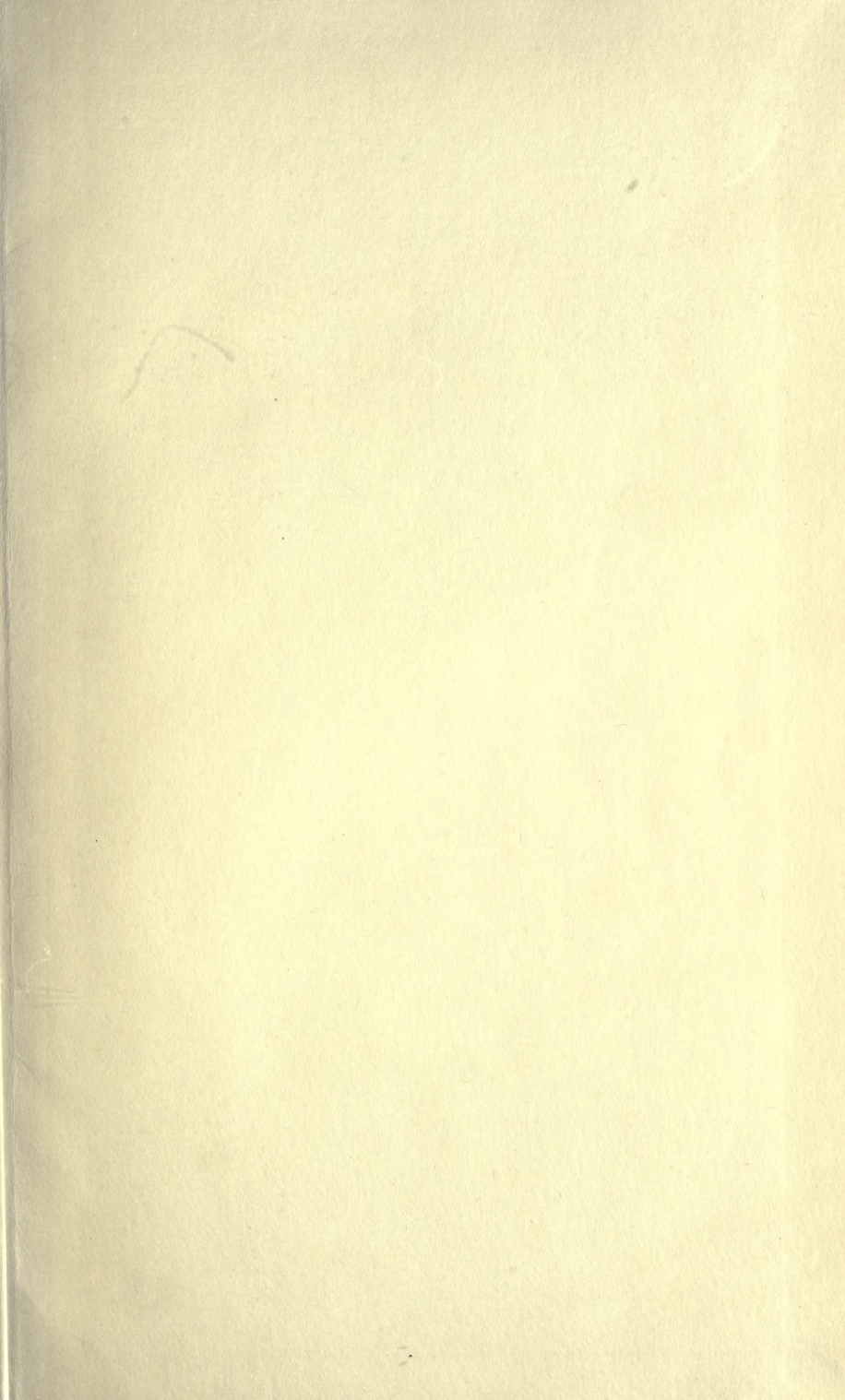
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THE

STATEMANSHIP OF

WILLIAM WORTH

BY

JOHN R. WOOD

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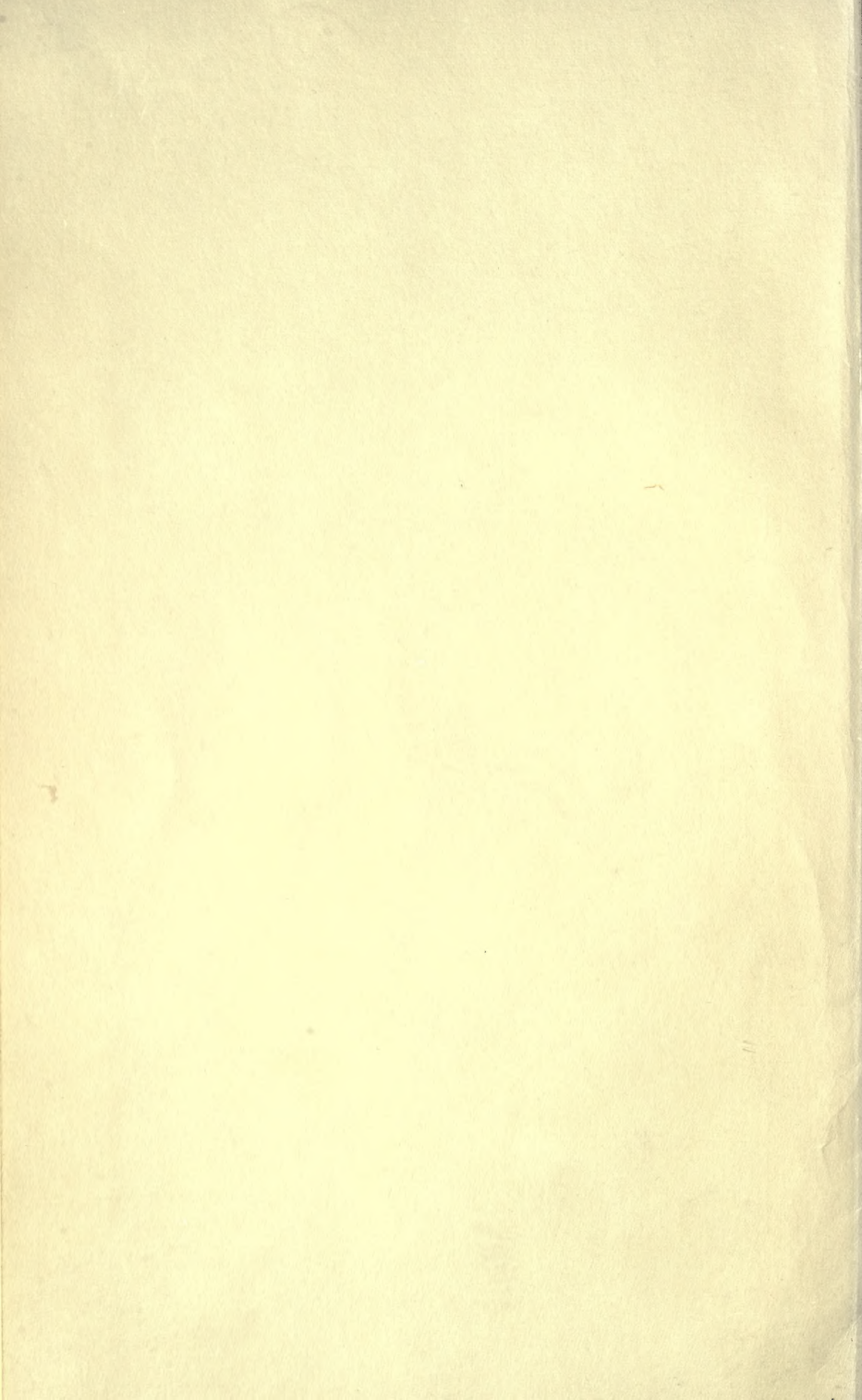
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STATESMANSHIP OF  
WORDSWORTH

AN ESSAY

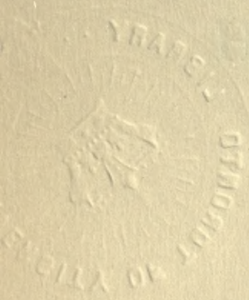
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TO  
MY FRIEND  
ADOLPHUS ALFRED JACK

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

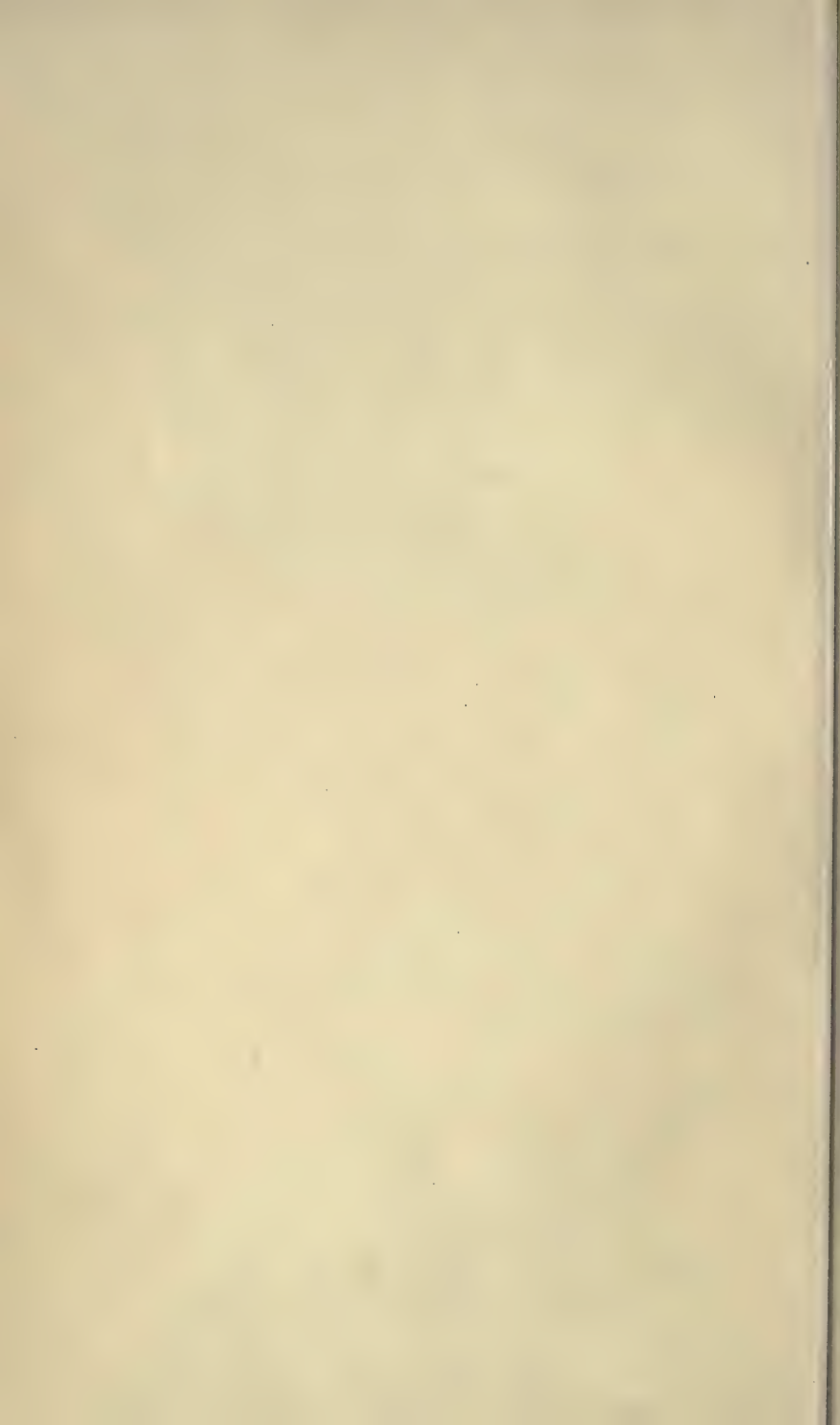
TO  
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PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE  
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## PREFATORY NOTE

THIS essay treats of Wordsworth's statesmanship from 1802 to 1815. A great part of it has already appeared in the form of articles on that subject in *The Nineteenth Century and After*. I take this opportunity of giving my most sincere thanks to the Editor of that periodical for his liberality in allowing me to make free use in the following pages of such articles. I acknowledge also my great obligation to Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co. for their permission to reprint at full length from the *Letters of John Stuart Mill*, published by them in 1910, Mill's account of his visit to Wordsworth in 1831. It is by far the best literary portrait of the poet, when already over sixty years of age, which I have been able to discover. Lastly, it is a pleasure to me to state that in writing this essay I have received the greatest help from the suggestions of many friends better acquainted than myself with the whole of Wordsworth's poetry, and more especially from W. P. Ker, Professor of English Literature in University College, London, and from Miss H. Darbishire, Tutor in English Literature at Somerville College, Oxford, and editor of *Wordsworth's Poems in Two Volumes of 1807*.

OXFORD,  
April, 1917.





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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

To many readers the very title of this book—*The Statesmanship of Wordsworth*—may cause perplexity. To most of them Wordsworth is known as a poet, and possibly as one of the most famous of English poets. He is known to them also as a moralist. But they know that he never sat in Parliament, and never tried to obtain a seat there. How then can such a man have had anything to do with statesmanship? The few who have heard of Wordsworth as in any sense connected with politics probably think of him, owing to the misrepresentation or misapprehension of opponents, as an ill-fated man of letters who in early life was a revolutionist, not to say a Jacobin, but who in his later years was so panic-stricken by the Reign of Terror that he became the most vehement and bigoted of Tories. He is looked upon, in short, as a thinker who might be described, with many others of his time, as a weather-cock which, having grown rusty, set up as a sign-post. Such a one,

<sup>1</sup> *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by the Rev. A. B. Grosart, 3 vols. E. Moxon, 1876. (Hereinafter referred to as Grosart.)

*The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by T. Hutchinson, Oxford edition, 1895. (Hereinafter referred to as Hutchinson.)

*The Patriotic Poetry of William Wordsworth*. By the Right Hon. Arthur H. D. Acland. Oxford, 1915.

Wordsworth's *Tract on the Convention of Cintra* [published 1809]. Republished Oxford University Press, 1915. (Hereinafter referred to as *Tract*.)



people feel, may have been a distinguished poet or a high-toned moralist, but can never have influenced or have played any real part in the public life of England.

The language of Wordsworth's most distinguished critics sometimes fosters this idea of Wordsworth which denies to his life the possibility of having told upon the policy of his country. The poet and man of letters, whose subtle analysis of Wordsworth's genius will always be quoted with admiration by Wordsworth's admirers, has yet unintentionally provided some justification for the notion that Wordsworth was a dreamer. The teacher who wrote of Wordsworth—

He found us when the age had bound  
Our souls in its benumbing round;  
He spoke, and loosed our hearts in tears.  
He laid us as we lay at birth  
On the cool flowery lap of earth,  
Smiles broke from us and we had ease;  
The hills were round us, and the breeze  
Went o'er the sun-lit fields again;  
Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.  
Our youth return'd; for there was shed  
On spirits that had long been dead,  
Spirits dried up and closely furl'd,  
The freshness of the early world.<sup>1</sup>

has no doubt revealed to hundreds of students a comprehension of Wordsworth's doctrine which they would never have obtained for themselves. No man is less inclined than myself to underrate Matthew Arnold's subtle appreciation of a great poet whom he no doubt understood far better than did the generation whom he addressed. My sole contention is that the emphasis given to the ethical side of Wordsworth's teaching has

<sup>1</sup> See Matthew Arnold, Memorial Verses, *Poetical Works* (Macmillan), pp. 290-1.

sometimes concealed from view certain other true aspects of Wordsworth's character and of his action, and does not directly suggest the passionate interest which he took in the public life of England<sup>1</sup> and his intense effort to make his countrymen march firmly towards righteousness and towards a peace grounded on the destruction of despotism. It should, moreover, be noted that if Wordsworth's statesmanship has failed (either through the misrepresentation of his opponents or through the one-sided admiration felt for his poetry and his moral doctrine by his disciples) to obtain due recognition, he has himself sometimes been his own calumniator. Take the language in which he paints a poet :

But who is He, with modest looks,  
And clad in homely russet brown ?  
He murmurs near the running brooks  
A music sweeter than their own.

He is retired as noontide dew,  
Or fountain in a noon-day grove ;  
And you must love him, ere to you  
He will seem worthy of your love.

The outward shows of sky and earth,  
Of hill and valley, he has viewed ;  
And impulses of deeper birth  
Have come to him in solitude.

In common things that round us lie  
Some random truths he can impart ;—  
The harvest of a quiet eye  
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth said to a friend in 1833, 'That although he was known to the world only as a poet, he had given twelve hours thought to the condition and prospects of society, for one to poetry.' See W. Hale White, *Examination of the Charge of Apostasy against Wordsworth*, p. 16, citing Works of Orville Dewey, ed. 1844, p. 622.

But he is weak ; both Man and Boy,  
Hath been an idler in the land ;  
Contented if he might enjoy  
The things which others understand.<sup>1</sup> (1799.)

These verses may with some confidence be taken not exactly as Wordsworth's portrait of himself, but as Wordsworth's picture of an ideal poet and moralist endowed with Wordsworth's special beliefs and with his poetical imagination. These lines contain valuable self-interpretation, but like all confessions or revelations in which fact is consciously blended with imagination, while they contain much of truth they also contain some misleading suggestions. A prosaic reader, for example, who took the last verse as in fact applicable to Wordsworth, might conclude that the poet was in some sense a weakling and an idler content to pass his life in the quiet enjoyment of all that creation contains of beauty and goodness. But no conclusion drawn from a man's own words could be more false. Everything in Wordsworth's life, including his defects no less than his virtues, tells of strength not of weakness, of indomitable energy untouched by indolence. He may at times have dreamed away hours or days, yet this dreaming sprung neither from indolence nor irresolution but from the profound conviction

That we can feed this mind of ours  
In a wise passiveness.<sup>2</sup>

Put Wordsworth side by side with Coleridge and you will at once feel the difference between literary genius combined with strength, and the same high genius linked to and all but ruined by weakness. Wordsworth was no idler. The words which paint the idleness of a poet

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 485.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, p. 481.



were written at the very time when Wordsworth's powers had reached their full development, and his brain teemed with statesmanlike conceptions about the right relation between France and England.

My conviction then is that while Wordsworth's eminence as a poet is, in England at least, universally acknowledged, his distinction as a statesman has not received anything like due recognition. No attempt whatever is made in this essay to analyse or to form an estimate of Wordsworth's poetry. The labours of critics possessed of a literary competence and knowledge, to which no claim can be made by the present writer, have established Wordsworth's right to a high rank in the long line of English poets. This essay is written with the sole aim of establishing the remarkable character of his statesmanship. My object is to show that at the very crisis of the Great War between England and Napoleon (that is to say from 1802 to 1815) Wordsworth tendered to English politicians and to the people of England the wisest counsel expressed in the noblest language; that he by many years anticipated, thought out and announced the doctrine of Nationalism, which during at least fifty years of the nineteenth century (1820-70) governed or told upon the foreign policy of every European country; and that the policy of Wordsworth, as set forth during the war with Napoleon, suggests questions and contains lessons which vitally concern England when engaged, as at present, in a world-wide war to save the independence of the British Empire and of every other free State. My attempt to establish the insight and foresight of Wordsworth's statesmanship during the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century, has indeed been instigated by a faint hope that the thoughts and

words of Wordsworth, which cheered and strengthened our grandfathers in their resistance to Napoleonic despotism, might encourage and strengthen Englishmen of to-day in their determination to destroy an aggressive military despotism far stronger and far more cruel than the tyranny which Napoleon all but imposed upon the whole continent of Europe.

## CHAPTER I

### WORDSWORTH'S STATESMANLIKE QUALITIES

WORDSWORTH was a man of genius. He was a poet, but then he was no ordinary poet; his poetry is the fruit of ardent imagination guided by common sense, by profound reflection, and by the keenest eye for common things. His ideas as to politics, and especially as to foreign affairs, have the closest affinity with his poetry. Both are based upon the recognition of obvious facts.

He was endowed by nature with the acutest powers of observation. It is admitted by all men that

The outward shows of sky and earth,  
Of hill and valley, he has viewed;  
And impulses of deeper birth  
Have come to him in solitude.<sup>1</sup>

But though Wordsworth delighted in the country, and especially in hills and valleys, he drank in with the utmost rapidity and, when young, with intense avidity, whatever his eyes taught him of town life. Hence he has drawn the best pictures of that Old London which is now to most of us merely a tradition, and not even a memory to any man not enough advanced in years to recall the sights and sounds of at least early Victorian London.

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 485.



Whoever doubts that this is so should ponder over the following picture of London streets :<sup>1</sup>

. . . . . Before me flow,

Thou endless stream of men and moving things!  
 Thy every-day appearance, as it strikes—  
 With wonder heightened, or sublimed by awe—  
 On strangers, of all ages; the quick dance  
 Of colours, lights, and forms; the deafening din;  
 The comers and the goers face to face,  
 Face after face; the string of dazzling wares,  
 Shop after shop, with symbols, blazoned names,  
 And all the tradesman's honours overhead:  
 Here, fronts of houses, like a title-page,  
 With letters huge inscribed from top to toe,  
 Stationed above the door, like guardian saints;  
 There, allegoric shapes, female or male,  
 Or physiognomies of real men,  
 Land-warriors, kings, or admirals of the sea,  
 Boyle, Shakespeare, Newton, or the attractive head  
 Of some quack-doctor, famous in his day.<sup>2</sup>

He possessed, even in youth, a naturally sound judgement. Wordsworth was himself aware of the extent to which good sense and reflection in his mind balanced the effect of his fervent imagination. These are the words in which he describes his attitude when quite a

<sup>1</sup> This sketch of the Town is paralleled by many passages in *The Prelude*. Ruskin's works are full of references to Dickens, and Ruskin clearly catches and suggests the likeness, in point of keenness of eye, between the poet and the novelist. (See *Modern Painters*, Ruskin's Collected Works, iii, pp. 570, 571, and read the whole note in reference to Dickens.) In truth Wordsworth, Carlyle, Dickens, and Ruskin himself, belong to that special class to be found among men of genius who may be characterized as (if the expression may be allowed) 'thinking through their eyes'. Such men immediately reproduce in thought the impressions which their keen eyesight conveys to them, and which ordinary persons overlook. Nor can it be doubted that of the four Wordsworth was the keenest observer, no less than the calmest critic.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, p. 689.

young man, just before he became personally involved in the revolutionary conflict:

And I, who at that time was scarcely dipped  
Into the turmoil, bore a sounder judgement  
Than later days allowed; carried about me,  
With less alloy to its integrity,  
The experience of past ages, as, through help  
Of books and common life, it makes sure way  
To youthful minds, by objects over near  
Not pressed upon, nor dazzled or misled  
By struggling with the crowd for present ends.<sup>1</sup>

This confidence in his own judgement was no self-deception. It is incidentally confirmed by the language of the one man who ever had a really intimate knowledge of the poet. Coleridge, when writing with the severity of a candid friend, notes the extraordinary combination in Wordsworth of strong sense with imaginative genius and declares that

Without his depth of feeling and his imaginative power, his *sense* would want its vital warmth and peculiarity; and without his strong sense, his *mysticism* would become *sickly*—mere fog and dimness.<sup>2</sup>

Circumstances conferred upon him another tremendous advantage which has rarely fallen to the lot of an English statesman. He before he attained full age, and throughout life, personally felt the blessings—and they may be very great—both of poverty and of wealth. Living among the yeomen, or so-called 'statesmen', of Cumberland and Westmorland, he was trained up to

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 714.

<sup>2</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ii. 161. Compare the immense impression of Wordsworth's wisdom and fairness made upon J. S. Mill, then a young man of twenty-five, on a visit to Wordsworth during 1831. See p. 112, *post*.

independence of spirit.<sup>1</sup> He never knew the curse either of the patron or of the jail. At an excellent grammar school, and next at the University of Cambridge, he obtained as good and as liberal an education as was open to the children of any squire or nobleman. But he never at any period of his life was rich; he knew what it was to have an empty purse as well as ever did Cobbett or Burns. Hence he understood and sympathized with the wants of the poor. He looked at life as a whole, and especially at the French Revolution, at once from the point of view of an educated and thoughtful English gentleman, and also from the side of an independent yeoman who had earned by hard work every penny which he had gained, and with whom shillings and pounds were at no time too plentiful.

Wordsworth, further, from his intellectual and moral endowments, as well as from the circumstances of his time, of his upbringing, and of his career, entertained, at any rate up to 1815, a passionate interest in the conduct of public affairs, and a keen sympathy with vigorous action even at times when it approached to lawlessness.<sup>2</sup> But his faith in noble causes which

<sup>1</sup> 'The thoughts, feelings, language, and manners of the shepherd-farmers in the vales of Cumberland and Westmorland', writes Coleridge, 'may be accounted for from causes, which will and do produce the same results in every state of life, whether in town or country. As the two principal I rank that independence, which raises a man above servitude, or daily toil for the profit of others, yet not above the necessity of industry and a frugal simplicity of domestic life; and the accompanying unambitious, but solid and religious, education, which has rendered few books familiar, but the Bible, and the Liturgy or Hymn-book.'—*Biographia Literaria*, ii. 45.

<sup>2</sup> See his verses on Rob Roy, written, be it noted, before Scott had introduced that vigorous and crafty chief of the outlawed



appealed to his moral feeling was generally kept within due bounds. He retained indeed throughout life that enthusiasm of humanity which with most men is apt to die away at the approach of middle age, yet even in quite early manhood he displayed a coolness and soundness of judgement<sup>1</sup> which, if ever acquired at all, is generally the fruit of aged experience. Now all the qualities of Wordsworth's character, if they did not directly qualify him for public life, assuredly protected him from some weaknesses to which are due the errors of parliamentary speakers and leaders. The worst mistakes of such practical men arise not from some lack of recondite knowledge, but from their incapacity, when dealing with public affairs, for fixing their minds firmly and exclusively upon the few vital, essential, and often obvious features of a perplexing crisis. This tendency to lose sight of leading principles because of a politician's preoccupation with subordinate details was, at any rate in Wordsworth's case, corrected or averted by his undoubted capacity for serious thought combined with the gift, often lacking to systematic thinkers, of keen observation.

Readers, however, who wish to understand the

Macgregors to the British public. They contain a humorous commendation of the good old rule, the simple plan—

That they should take, who have the power,  
And they should keep who can. (Hutchinson, p. 291.)

<sup>1</sup> Compare the moderation of the language which Wordsworth (then a young man of twenty-three) uses towards Bishop Watson in the *Apology for the French Revolution* with the contemptuous invective which Burke (when a statesman of sixty-one) pours in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* upon a thinker so eminent as Richard Price.

statesmanship of Wordsworth must constantly bear in mind two considerations.<sup>1</sup>

The first consideration is that Wordsworth occupied a special and peculiar political position. He was in reality, in regard at any rate to foreign policy, neither a Whig nor a Tory. The dawn of liberty in France had in his early youth enlisted his fervent sympathy.

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very Heaven!

These words recall the early enthusiasm of the French Revolution; they sum up indeed the noble aspirations, in 1789 or 1790, of every man throughout Europe who valued the blessings of freedom and believed that the people of France were entering on the path of human progress. These men of hope all felt with Cowper:

'Tis liberty alone that gives the flower  
Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume;  
And we are weeds without it.<sup>2</sup>

In welcoming the earlier stages of the French revolt against despotism all the Whigs, with the one exception of Burke, went together.<sup>3</sup> They thought that the political heirs of the statesmen who, in 1688, opposed the tyranny of James the Second, must of necessity applaud Frenchmen who, in 1789, resisted the despotism of the Bourbons. Wordsworth, however, went further than any Whig. He never mistook a movement, which

<sup>1</sup> The first of these considerations is treated of in this chapter; the second is, though referred to in this chapter, treated of in detail in ch. ii, p. 18, *post*.

<sup>2</sup> Cowper, *Poetical Works*, ii. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Of Cowper it has been said with truth, but with a certain quaint inappropriateness, that he was born a Whig, and remained a Whig to the day of his death.

shook the whole of Europe as violently as did the Reformation, for a second-hand copy of the glorious but almost conservative Revolution of 1688. Wordsworth saw indeed, as clearly as did Burke,<sup>1</sup> that the movement in France was the opening of a new era, and he, unlike Burke, welcomed it with enthusiasm. As a boy he had imbibed the republicanism of feeling natural to one nurtured among the statesmen or yeomen of Cumberland.<sup>2</sup> He had learned at college the republicanism of sentiment handed down by the classical writers; he had imbibed the wholesome belief that

Distinction open lay to all that came,  
And wealth and titles were in less esteem  
Than talents, worth, and prosperous industry.<sup>3</sup>

His life in France had attached him to the Girondins, and he for a time had adopted the unsound political philosophy of the Revolution. Nor is there any reason to believe that his sympathy with the Girondins ever died out. You will find nowhere in his works any expression of indignation at the death of Louis the Sixteenth.<sup>4</sup> He probably believed, in common with the Girondins, that the king was prepared to use foreign help in effecting the restoration of the royal power.

<sup>1</sup> For Wordsworth's intellectual relation to Burke, see pp. 59-70, *post.*

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 712, 713.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 713.

<sup>4</sup> 'You wish it to be supposed you are one of those who are unpersuaded of the guilt of Louis XVI. If you had attended to the history of the French Revolution as minutely as its importance demands, so far from stopping to bewail his death, you would rather have regretted that the blind fondness of his people had placed a human being in that monstrous situation which rendered him unaccountable before a human tribunal.'—*Apology for the French Revolution*, 1793, addressed by Wordsworth to Bishop Watson. Grosart, i. 4.



Whether this design was duly punished by death is a question for political casuists. It is certain that in England no king would have been forgiven who had sought to recover his throne by the use of foreign armies. Wordsworth undoubtedly held and maintained that the coalitions formed before the time of Napoleon for the armed restoration of the *ancien régime* ought not to have received the help of England. But if Wordsworth expected the redemption of the world from the triumph of justice and entertained an unquenchable faith in freedom as understood in England, and as he believed it to be practised in Switzerland, he had in 1802, and probably earlier, adopted a great part, and one may fairly say in every sense the best part, of the teaching of Burke.<sup>1</sup> The influence of Burke, reinforced by the bloody injustice of which the Girondins were victims, had impressed once and for all upon him the futility and the folly of the attempt to introduce a reign of righteousness by defying the ordinary rules of public justice and of moral obligation. Nor can one doubt that from the same teacher he had also derived the conviction that a nation was not a mere agglomeration of individuals, and that human progress must throughout the whole world be closely connected with respect for national history and traditions.

To this union of ideas, which few men of Wordsworth's generation could easily combine, is due a great deal of his statesmanlike strength. His early republicanism enabled him to see that the French Revolution conferred, in spite of the tremendous evils with which it was accompanied, some real blessings upon mankind. The

<sup>1</sup> For Wordsworth's discriminating appreciation of Burke, see p. 68, *post*.

historical method, further learned from Burke, combined most happily with Wordsworth's keen eye for everyday facts and his habitual meditation on human character. For it freed him from that belief in abstractions which constantly misguides the most disinterested of revolutionists or of reformers. The ideas of equality, of nationality, and even the sacred names of liberty and of justice, are, because of their very vagueness, the frequent source of the gravest errors. Any man, whether he be a politician, a preacher, or a revolutionist, will work infinite evil, even to a good cause, if he neglects to correct the delusiveness of abstract ideas by always comparing them with 'the common things which round us lie'. The very thinkers who have made war upon innate ideas are often led, through their partiality for some one general conception, into the very delusions which they think they have exposed. Wordsworth at any rate is always coming back to realities. Then again, his appreciation of different aspects of truth certainly checked the growth of that intense party spirit which corrupted English politics during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Coke of Holkham was a man of ability. He exercised vast influence among the Whigs. When a mere child he was told by his grandfather, 'Now remember, Tom, as long as you live never trust a Tory.' The same lesson was impressed upon him by his father, and, when repeating these family anecdotes, he generally added that he had said in reply, 'I never have and by God I never will trust a Tory'; he acted throughout life in accordance with this pledge. In Whig circles the tradition prevailed that a mother, when asked by her child why the Tories are so wicked, at once replied, 'They are born wicked, and they have made themselves

worse.' Sydney Smith was a man of the strongest common sense, of great humour, and of much good nature, but in his writings he found it all but impossible to display common fairness to Perceval or Canning. This bitterness was certainly not confined to Whigs. Walter Scott was a man of genius, and of geniality, and, when he trusted to his own sound judgement, he saw clearly enough into the difficulties of social and political problems. But he and his friends generally meant by a man of 'good principles' a sound Tory. In 1824 Scott regretted that the young Duke of Buccleuch should be sent to Cambridge because that university 'was infected long ago with liberalism in politics', and at the moment encouraged a doubtful kind of enthusiasm in religion which 'makes religion a motive and a pretext for particular lines of thinking in politics and in temporal affairs'.<sup>1</sup> The date of 1824 suggests that Scott was frightened by Evangelicalism as preached by Charles Simeon, and somehow or other thought it might tend towards political liberalism. He looked with some slight suspicion on the distinctly Whiggish lectures of 'my friend, Professor Smyth', who is chiefly remarkable in that, being a Regius Professor of History in one of the English Universities, he in 1824 actually delivered historical lectures and found a class of students who attended them. In such a condition of feeling Wordsworth gained in political insight from the fact that he was neither a Whig nor a Tory. He easily became an original thinker who at the height of his powers had thought out a social and political doctrine of his own.

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, by J. G. Lockhart, iii. 209, letter from Scott to Lord Montagu, 15th June, 1824.



The second consideration<sup>1</sup> is, as regards Wordsworth's statesmanship, of incalculable importance. He early in life had obtained an intimate and first-hand knowledge of the French people which was certainly not possessed even by the few English statesmen who had lived much on the continent of Europe. This peculiar knowledge of France and her people is in several aspects of such importance that it is fully considered in the next chapter.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 12, *ante*.

## CHAPTER II

### WORDSWORTH'S KNOWLEDGE OF FRANCE

WORDSWORTH travelled in France for the first time in 1790. He was a young man not quite twenty-one years of age. He travelled then, and during most of the time when he was in France, mainly on foot. He passed again rather more than a year in France, between November 1791 and December 1792.<sup>1</sup> He was thus in France at the very height of the French Revolution. He shared, in common with the great majority of liberal-minded men throughout Europe, all the hopefulness of the revolutionary dawn. He became so intimately associated with the Girondins that, had he been still in France at the time of their fall, he probably would have died together with his friends; in his own words:

Doubtless, I should have then made common cause  
With some who perished; haply perished too,  
A poor mistaken and bewildered offering,—  
Should to the breast of Nature have gone back,  
With all my resolutions, all my hopes,  
A Poet only to myself, to men  
Useless. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Hence he acquired in the earliest and the most impressionable years of his manhood an intimate and a first-hand knowledge of the opinions, the feelings, the prejudices, the virtues, and the faults of the French people. He was not a rich man. Travelling often on foot, he came to know men of all classes. He was on easy

<sup>1</sup> Or possibly, January 1793.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, p. 721.

terms with the wanderers he met along the high roads. But he was also an educated English gentleman ; this was soon seen to be the case when he was living in towns. When he was living in a town, such as Blois, he made acquaintance with military officers who were Royalists and ultimately, as *émigrés*, fought against France and endeavoured to arrest the Revolution or to restore the Monarchy. He formed closer friendships with military officers who were ardent Republicans determined to resist at all costs the invaders of their country. He became, as we have noted, the close ally of the leading Girondins, who, whatever their defects, were the sincerest of French Republicans ; while they were enthusiasts for equality, they were not inclined to sacrifice to its attainment their fervent love of liberty. Compare the opportunities which fell to Wordsworth for studying the character of Frenchmen with the opportunities of Arthur Young, a man of rare ability who noted with care the condition of France at the outbreak of the Revolution. Young's Journal of his travels in France is still, as far as Englishmen are concerned, the main authority for the needs and the desires of French farmers and agriculturists in 1789. But Young was then a well-known man. He had introductions to noblemen and gentlemen. He travelled on horseback or in a carriage. Wordsworth did not possess Young's knowledge of agriculture ; and Young must have known more than Wordsworth of the nobility and gentry of France. But Wordsworth, we may well believe, must have learned more than did the intelligent gentleman-farmer about the enthusiasm of the French peasantry and about the sufferings and the feelings of the poor in Blois or in Paris. And if Young was an incomparable observer of



French agriculture before and in 1789, he apparently saw nothing of France after that year.<sup>1</sup> But Wordsworth studied France during the very height of the revolutionary conflict.

His observations of revolutionary life have, by a rare piece of good fortune, been recorded by him in *The Prelude*.<sup>2</sup> This work is on the face of it an autobiographical poem written to describe the growth of the poet's mind. It presents, however, two features of marked interest which are quite independent of any question of poetical interest. It is, in the first place, in so far as it refers to the Revolution, an historical document, for it gives an invaluable record of first-hand reflection by a keen observer, endowed at once with sympathetic imagination and with profound thoughtfulness, on some of the leading

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth's first-hand knowledge of the people of France contrasts curiously with the very slight degree of acquaintance with the common people of any foreign country which could be gained by a diplomatist such as the first Earl Granville. He was a charming fellow. He was the delight of Society. He was the best whist-player of his day, though he lost a good deal more than he gained by this accomplishment. He was a confirmed gambler, and he spent a great part of his time in elaborate flirtations, which might perhaps be described as intrigues, with women. He was, however, an accomplished diplomatist, and we may believe that his labours in the service of his country were not altogether fruitless. But a gentleman of this type cannot have gained much knowledge of the people inhabiting the several countries where he represented the British Crown.

<sup>2</sup> *The Prelude* was begun in 1799; it was finished in 1805. It was not published till after Wordsworth's death. The parts of *The Prelude* bearing on Wordsworth's residence in France are mainly contained in Books IX, X, and XI. These books are said to have been written in 1804. But it is apparently not known how far Wordsworth during his later life may have altered expressions therein used. *The Prelude* was revised by Wordsworth in 1839. See Harper's *Wordsworth*, ii. 407.

events of the Revolution. And apparently these notes on the Revolution were written within about twelve years of the latest of the events witnessed in France by Wordsworth. The value of this historical document to historians of the Revolution has hardly as yet received adequate acknowledgement.<sup>1</sup> In the second place, *The Prelude* is a picture of the convictions which, obtained by Wordsworth in his youth, coloured the whole of his statesmanship from 1802 to 1815. My hope has been to exhibit the twofold value of *The Prelude* by setting forth some of Wordsworth's compressed thoughts on the Revolution in his own words, accompanied by such comment as may explain or emphasize to readers acquainted with the outline of revolutionary history the purport and effect of his language.

(A) *The Joy of the Revolutionary Dawn.*

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very Heaven! O times,  
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways  
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once  
The attraction of a country in romance!<sup>2</sup>

But Europe at that time was thrilled with joy,  
France standing on the top of golden hours,  
And human nature seeming born again.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The importance of *The Prelude*, as an historical record of opinion and feeling during the Revolution, would probably have been more highly appreciated had the work been published, as it might well have been, before the appearance of Carlyle's *French Revolution*. Intelligent readers would then have felt that some of the ideas which were first conveyed to the English public by Carlyle had been anticipated by Wordsworth.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 728, 729.

<sup>3</sup> Hutchinson, p. 680. Compare Coleridge's

When France in wrath her giant-limbs upreared,  
And with that oath, which smote air, earth, and sea,  
Stamped her strong foot and said she would be free.

See Coleridge's 'France—An Ode', *Poetical Works*, i. 128.

On the 13th of July, 1790, the day before the great federal festival<sup>1</sup> to be celebrated at Paris, Wordsworth and a friend, intending to walk through France on their way to Switzerland, chanced

To land at Calais on the very eve  
Of that great federal day ; and there we saw,  
In a mean city, and among a few,  
How bright a face is worn when joy of one  
Is joy for tens of millions. Southward thence  
We held our way, direct through hamlets, towns,  
Gaudy with reliques of that festival,  
Flowers left to wither on triumphal arcs,  
And window garlands. . . .<sup>2</sup>

The travellers some time later meet delegates returning from the great federal festival at Paris, and at an evening meal were, as Englishmen—

Guests welcome almost as the angels were  
To Abraham of old. The supper done,  
With flowing cups elate and happy thoughts  
We rose at signal given, and formed a ring  
And, hand in hand, danced round and round the board ;  
All hearts were open, every tongue was loud  
With amity and glee ; we bore a name  
Honoured in France, the name of Englishmen,  
And hospitably did they give us hail,  
As their forerunners in a glorious course ;  
And round and round the board we danced again.  
With these blithe friends our voyage we renewed  
At early dawn. . . .<sup>3</sup>

On their arrival in Switzerland the strangers found that the joy of France spread to adjacent countries :

A glorious time,  
A happy time that was ; triumphant looks  
Were then the common language of all eyes ;

<sup>1</sup> See Carlyle, *French Revolution*, i. (ed. 1857), pp. 264-80.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, p. 680.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 681.



As if awaked from sleep, the Nations hailed  
 Their great expectancy: the fife of war  
 Was then a spirit-stirring sound indeed,  
 A blackbird's whistle in a budding grove.  
 We left the Swiss exulting in the fate  
 Of their near neighbours. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Contrast this description of France full of revolutionary enthusiasm with the picture drawn of the same country as seen in 1755 by another poet and traveller who, like Wordsworth, walked through France with very little money in his pocket, and entered into the true life of her common people<sup>2</sup>:

To kinder skies, where gentler manners reign,  
 I turn; and France displays her bright domain.  
 Gay sprightly land of mirth and social ease,  
 Pleas'd with thyself, whom all the world can please,  
 How often have I led thy sportive choir,  
 With tuneless pipe, beside the murmuring Loire?

Dames of ancient days  
 Have led their children through the mirthful maze  
 And the gay grandsire, skill'd in gestic lore,  
 Has frisk'd beneath the burthen of threescore.

So blest a life these thoughtless realms display,  
 Thus idly busy rolls their world away;  
 Theirs are those arts that mind to mind endear,  
 For honour forms the social temper here.  
 Honour, that praise which real merit gains,  
 Or even imaginary worth obtains,

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 686.

<sup>2</sup> Compare J. S. Mill's high estimate of the advantage he derived from having in youth 'breathed for a whole year the free and genial atmosphere of Continental [i. e. French] life', and the contrast which he draws 'between the frank sociability and amiability of French personal intercourse, and the English mode of existence in which everybody acts as if everybody else (with few, or no exceptions) was either an enemy or a bore'. Mill, *Autobiography*, pp. 58, 60.

Here passes current; paid from hand to hand,  
 It shifts in splendid traffick round the land:  
 From courts to camps, to cottages it strays,  
 And all are taught an avarice of praise;  
 They please, are pleas'd, they give to get esteem  
 Till, seeming blest, they grow to what they seem.<sup>1</sup>

The charm of France to Goldsmith, in 1755, as to Wordsworth in 1790, lay in the sympathetic character of Frenchmen. This capacity for the sharing in social emotion is a partial explanation of some of the noblest, and also of some among the most terrible, of the shifting scenes of the revolutionary drama. Wordsworth himself, it is obvious, fully shared the generous and unbounded aspirations of the federal festival. Age brought him much experience and much wisdom. But his many modern admirers to whom he is a preacher of peace, a quietist, or a mystic, do not understand their prophet. They do not realize that he remained to the end an enthusiast and, even under his apparent conservatism, a revolutionist. He never turned away from France as long as she remained the defender of liberty. He never in substance renounced the hopes inspired by the federal festival. His intense hopefulness was limited only by two convictions: He

Ill could brook, beholding that the best  
 Ruled not, and feeling that they ought to rule.<sup>2</sup>

He firmly again believed that there exists

One great society alone on earth:  
 The noble Living and the noble Dead.<sup>3</sup>

What is the explanation of the intense joy and the boundless hope excited by the dawn of the Revolution? It is to be found mainly in two circumstances. The

<sup>1</sup> *The Traveller*, Goldsmith's Works, ii. 46, 47.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, p. 712.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 733.

first is that the men of 1789 knew from their own personal experience that continental Europe was oppressed by the weight of a mass of institutions which, in France at any rate, have been summed up under the term of the *ancien régime*, and that these institutions, whatever their origin, and whatever at an earlier period their possible utility, were making the life of whole classes unbearable. Englishmen felt with especial force that the despotism of the Bourbons was a curse to the world. France, it is true, was better governed than many other continental countries, but to our forefathers she seemed the centre and the support of a whole system of despotism.<sup>1</sup> They were the more alive to the evils of arbitrary government in France, because it had, from the time of Louis the Fourteenth downwards, meant the persecution of Protestants and resistance to the expansion of the British Empire. Facts which were common knowledge, or at any rate common belief, in 1789, made the meeting of the States-General and the fall of the Bastille events which cheered almost every enlightened man throughout Europe. But while the convictions of a past age, if unlike the ideas of the twentieth century, are forgotten, we fail at the present day to realize that in 1789 no man living could foresee the course of the French Revolution any more than the most sagacious of Englishmen can to-day foretell the occurrences which will make up the history of the world between 1917 and 1927. The second circumstance is the prevalence in 1789 of the belief in the natural goodness and virtue of the people and in popular emotion as being the voice of God.

<sup>1</sup> See Goldsmith's Works, iii. *Citizen of the World*, Letter iv, pp. 10, 11.



It is worth while to trace in outline the force and the long continuance of a sentiment which in 1789 was entertained by such a man as Wordsworth and by many of his celebrated contemporaries. Illustration is here a telling and legitimate form of argument, since it makes manifest that, till late in the nineteenth century, a belief or a feeling, which would hardly be accepted to-day by any English thinker of sound sense, exerted a great influence on the public life of Europe.

Some years before the actual outbreak of the Revolution men of enlightenment and of hope felt with Cowper<sup>1</sup> that the need of the world was liberty.

In 1785, some four years before the meeting of the States-General, the religious recluse at Olney denounced with almost prophetic foresight and vigour the injustice, the cruelty, and the horrors of that Bastille which to the free citizens of England was the typical representative of French despotism—

Then shame to manhood, and opprobrious more  
To France than all her losses and defeats,  
Old or of later date, by sea or land,  
Her house of bondage, worse than that of old  
Which God avenged on Pharaoh—the Bastille.  
Ye horrid towers, the abode of broken hearts;  
Ye dungeons, and ye cages of despair,  
That monarchs have supplied from age to age  
With music, such as suits their sovereign ears,  
The sighs and groans of miserable men!  
There's not an English heart that would not leap  
To hear that ye were fallen at last; to know  
That e'en our enemies, so oft employ'd  
In forging chains for us, themselves were free.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See p. 12, *ante*. Of Cowper it has been said with truth, but with a certain quaint inappropriateness, that he was born a Whig, and remained a Whig to the day of his death.

<sup>2</sup> Cowper's *Poetical Works*, ii. 140. Compare Wordsworth,

On the 30th of July, 1789, Fox wrote of the taking of the Bastille, 'How much the greatest event it is that ever happened in the world, and how much the best.' In *The Prelude* Wordsworth writes, in reference to his own feelings with regard to the Revolution :

To aspirations then of our own minds  
Did we appeal ; and, finally, beheld  
A living confirmation of the whole  
Before us, in a people from the depth  
Of shameful imbecility uprisen,  
Fresh as the morning star. Elate we looked  
Upon their virtues ; saw, in rudest men,  
Self-sacrifice the firmest ; generous love,  
And continence of mind, and sense of right,  
Uppermost in the midst of fiercest strife.<sup>1</sup>

Nor did the ghastly tragedies of the Reign of Terror even among very sensible and serious men materially quench this trust in the political inspiration of the people. In 1830 the most respectable of the Whigs

*The Excursion*, Hutchinson, p. 796. The force and the import of Cowper's language is not materially diminished by the circumstance that when the Bastille fell not more than some six or seven prisoners were found within its walls, and they were persons of little consequence ; nor by the truth of the statement that the power of arbitrary imprisonment was little used during the reign of Louis the Sixteenth. The grievances and the mystery of the Chevalier D'Eon are of no more importance to-day than is the imposture of the pretended Roger Tichborne. But they prove that under the mild rule of Louis the Sixteenth, and within eleven years of the meeting of the States-General, a brave officer and a distinguished diplomatist could for some offence still unknown be, without trial, condemned to undergo a penance and a disgrace which could hardly be rivalled by the fanciful caprice of the torments inflicted by Oriental despotism ; and it is noticeable that after the meeting of the States-General the king was reluctant to give up the powers exercised by *lettres de cachet*. (See Dicey, *Law of the Constitution*, 8th ed. p. 187.)

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 715.

could hardly express sufficient delight in the glorious days of July, and the most serious and rightly venerated of Unitarian divines wrote in the same year :

France! glorious France! Has there ever been a week since the Resurrection which has promised such accumulated blessings to our race as that week of national regeneration? Where will it end? The invigorating shock must pass through the Netherlands, Spain, Italy. When that revolution is compared with any period of history, in what an encouraging light does it exhibit modern character and mind. The whole struggle has been conducted in a spirit of disinterestedness which to me is impressive in the highest degree. Such a people must be almost within sight of the value of religious truth.<sup>1</sup>

The Revolution of the 24th of February, 1848, sent Louis Philippe unregretted and unrespected into exile. From the first, Tocqueville maintained that the mob had lost none of its vices, had gained no new virtues, and had proved itself unworthy of freedom. But Ampère, one of the most eminent among his friends, maintained that the fall of the Orleanist dynasty was the triumph of liberty. Tocqueville further notes with grim humour the following queer example of the silly faith in the people prevalent among honest democrats. On the 15th of May the mob of Paris broke in upon the National Assembly, attempted to dissolve it by force and, but for the timely arrival of the National Guard, might probably have massacred its members. On the 26th of June an insurrection took place which even now remains the most fierce of the battles between the Army and the

<sup>1</sup> Language of James Martineau, in a letter to a friend, September 9, 1830. See *James Martineau, Theologian and Teacher*, p. 67 (n.), by J. Estlin Carpenter.



Parisian workmen which the streets of Paris have ever witnessed. Between these two events the Provisional Government celebrated in the midst of Paris a feast of Concord. A simple-minded democrat said to Tocqueville, 'Believe me, my dear colleague, you must always trust the people'. The reply came naturally enough: 'Why didn't you remind me of this on the eve of the 15th of May?'<sup>1</sup> Even as late as 1870 honest and sensible democrats felt that the proclamation of a Republic was not only politically wise, as it probably may have been in fact, but also would give an indefinable and mysterious power to France in her resistance to German invaders. Nor have Englishmen a right to reproach the citizens of foreign countries with a belief which borders on a democratic superstition. Respected statesmen have in England, as elsewhere, treated trust in the people as a complete summary of political wisdom.

There are at least two circumstances with regard to popular emotion<sup>2</sup> which deserve more attention than they have always received. The one is that a widespread and common sentiment may for a short time elevate a crowd above or sink it below the average level of human virtue. Even the execrable massacres of September, 1792, exemplify the operation of such sympathetic emotion. The blood-stained executioners slew one victim after another innocent of any crime. Occasionally, however, a man or a woman obtained by

<sup>1</sup> See Tocqueville, *Souvenirs*, p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> At periods of popular excitement there exists a close similarity between religious and political enthusiasm. They may indeed, as in the time of the English Commonwealth, be indistinguishably blended. Fanaticism is not in itself hypocrisy. It is ardent feeling or conviction, and will constantly place men either above or below their ordinary moral level.

chance, or by dexterity, acquittal by the most odious of improvised tribunals. In some of these rare cases the acquitted hero was carried home in triumph by the very ruffians who, on an adverse verdict, would without scruple have slaughtered him. These hired murderers at first disdained to sink into thieves, but such remnants of sentimental goodness soon, it is said, passed away. However this may be, the knowledge that a crowd under moral excitement may be guided rather by its emotions than by personal interest is, it may be suspected, a main ground for exaggerated trust in the occasional virtues of a mob. A second noticeable circumstance is that excessive confidence in the beneficial effect of political and especially of constitutional reforms is closely connected with inordinate trust in the virtue of the people. Let it once be assumed that the mass of mankind, and especially the poor, are by nature good, and very strange results will naturally, if not logically, follow from this assumption. It will, for example, whenever things go wrong, seem clear to democrats that the people, who are naturally good, must have been corrupted by kings, nobles, or priests. It will further be thought that to extend the fullest political rights to every citizen—e.g. by giving every one of them a vote—is one of the surest means towards restoring, in conformity with the intentions of Nature, the happiness and righteousness of mankind.

The character and the intensity of the hopes inspired by the dawn of the Revolution are curiously illustrated by Wordsworth's account of a conversation with General Michel de Beaupuy, with whom Wordsworth formed a close friendship whilst staying at Blois in 1792. The General stood almost alone as an ardent Republican

among the officers of the army stationed at that town. In Wordsworth's eyes he resembled one of Plutarch's heroes. He died some years later, fighting in defence of France. He was a man of great personal charm and stimulated or reinforced Wordsworth's natural, and so to speak classical, Republicanism. The two friends chanced

One day to meet a hunger-bitten girl,  
Who crept along fitting her languid gait  
Unto a heifer's motion, by a cord  
Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane  
Its sustenance, while the girl with pallid hands  
Was busy knitting in a heartless mood  
Of solitude, and at the sight my friend  
In agitation said, 'Tis against *that*  
That we are fighting,' I with him believed  
That a benignant spirit was abroad  
Which might not be withstood, that poverty  
Abject as this would in a little time  
Be found no more, that we should see the earth  
Unthwarted in her wish to recompense  
The meek, the lowly, patient child of toil,  
All institutes for ever blotted out  
That legalized exclusion, empty pomp  
Abolished, sensual state and cruel power,  
Whether by edict of the one or few;  
And finally, as sum and crown of all,  
Should see the people having a strong hand  
In framing their own laws; whence better days  
To all mankind.<sup>1</sup>

These verses are pregnant with meaning and throw immense light upon the republican or democratic creed of 1789. Beaupuy was a Republican. We may conjecture that he was, like Wordsworth, a Girondin. He certainly intended to confer upon the mass of the people not only extended political rights but also relief from

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 717.



want and poverty. The words 'Tis against *that* that we are fighting' are on this point decisive. He was, in other words, not only a Republican but also, though he knew it not, a Socialist. But the means by which he proposed to reform society from top to bottom were apparently the destruction of privilege and arbitrary power and, as the crown of all, the giving to the people a strong hand in framing their own laws. From these two changes he looked for better days to all mankind. In other words, Beaupuy and Wordsworth were in 1792 democrats who hoped to obtain every kind of socialistic reform by means which would have met with the approval of zealous individualists. And this peculiarity, as it seems to modern critics, of their position, was in reality shared alike by Girondins and Jacobins, and indeed by all the leading French revolutionists or reformers of 1789-1792. They all hoped to 'see the earth unthwarted in her wish to recompense the meek, the lowly, patient child of toil', or, in other words, to destroy the injustice of man and to give free scope to the imaginary equity of Nature. But they were not consciously socialists. In theory at least they were thorough-going individualists. As legislators they amply acknowledged the right to property as a natural right<sup>1</sup>—i. e. as a sacred right which ought carefully to be respected—and yet they intended to carry through reforms which should create days of joy and happiness for all mankind.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Declaration of Rights, art. 17, Constitution of September 3, 1791; Girondin Constitution of February 15, 16, 1793, art. 1; Jacobin Constitution of 1793, and especially the Declaration of Rights, arts. 1, 2; Constitution of 1795, Declaration of Rights, art. 3.

<sup>2</sup> The French Republican Calendar illustrates the desire of zealous reformers to start in France a brand-new system of govern-

This is the paradox of the revolutionary creed. The explanation thereof lies in the faith that the abolition of every privilege and the giving or restoring to every citizen of full political rights, and especially those natural rights, including the right to property, which are inviolable and sacred,<sup>1</sup> would create a new heaven and a new earth by giving free scope to Nature, whose benevolence and goodwill to mankind are thwarted only by the vices of society, which in their turn are created by the forgetfulness of, or the contempt for, the natural rights of man. But we all now know that some at any rate of the evils from which mankind suffer are closely connected with the very nature of things and with the weaknesses, not to say vices, of human nature itself. The fact was not perceived in 1789 by men of whom Beaupuy was a noble representative.<sup>2</sup>

(B) *The Massacres of September and the Reign of Terror.*

In November, 1791, Wordsworth paid his second visit to France, and remained in France till December, 1792. Even a stranger must have perceived that in less than a year from the date of the federal feast the era of bliss and joy had passed away, and that the land swarmed with passion. The King, it is true, had accepted the Constitution of the 3rd of September, 1791. He was in

ment. The oddity of the thing is that they invented names for the months of the year which, resting as they do on climatic considerations, could hardly be adopted by any country but France, and would be utterly inappropriate at the Antipodes.

<sup>1</sup> Compare Declaration of Rights, September 3, 1791, Preamble and art. 2, and arts. 16, 17.

<sup>2</sup> It may be suggested that even to the end of his life Wordsworth retained a faith in Nature which is not very characteristic of most modern thinkers.

name at least, and to a certain extent in fact, the head of the Executive. Wordsworth thus paints the state of Paris, either at the end of 1791 or early in 1792 :

In both her clamorous Halls,  
The National Synod and the Jacobins,  
I saw the Revolutionary Power  
Toss like a ship at anchor, rocked by storms ;  
The Arcades I traversed, in the Palace huge  
Of Orleans ; coasted round and round the line  
Of Tavern, Brothel, Gaming-house, and Shop,  
Great rendezvous of worst and best, the walk  
Of all who had a purpose, or had not ;  
I stared and listened, with a stranger's ears,  
To Hawkers and Haranguers, hubbub wild !  
And hissing Factionists with ardent eyes,  
In knots, or pairs, or single. Not a look  
Hope takes, or Doubt or Fear is forced to wear,  
But seemed there present ; and I scanned them all,  
Watched every gesture uncontrollable,  
Of anger, and vexation, and despite,  
All side by side, and struggling face to face,  
With gaiety and dissolute idleness.<sup>1</sup>

No words could more truly describe revolutionary Paris. Note that among the excited crowd hope still mingled with doubt and fear.

Wordsworth left Paris late in 1791, or early in 1792. He settled for a time in Blois, then full of soldiers, and made acquaintance with the officers.

A band of military Officers,  
Then stationed in the city, were the chief  
Of my associates : some of these wore swords  
That had been seasoned in the wars, and all  
Were men well-born ; the chivalry of France.  
In age and temper differing, they had yet  
One spirit ruling in each heart ; alike  
(Save only one, hereafter to be named)  
Were bent upon undoing what was done :

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 710.



This was their rest and only hope; therewith  
No fear had they of bad becoming worse,  
For worst to them was come; nor would have stirred,  
Or deemed it worth a moment's thought to stir,  
In anything, save only as the act  
Looked thitherward. . . .

Meanwhile the chief  
Of my associates stood prepared for flight  
To augment the band of emigrants in arms  
Upon the borders of the Rhine, and leagued  
With foreign foes mustered for instant war.  
This was their undisguised intent, and they  
Were waiting with the whole of their desires  
The moment to depart.<sup>1</sup>

But among the officers stationed at Blois was Michel de Beaupuy—whom we have already mentioned<sup>2</sup> and who died fighting—

For liberty, against deluded men,  
His fellow-countrymen; and yet most blessed  
In this, that he the fate of later times  
Lived not to see, nor what we now behold,  
Who have as ardent hearts as he had then.<sup>3</sup>

This picture makes clear the terrible change which had come over France between the federal festival of July, 1790, and the beginning or the middle of 1792. It excites various thoughts. The contrast between the military nobles, bent 'upon undoing' by an alliance with foreign foes 'what was done', and the Republican, Beaupuy, ready to fight to the death for the independence of France, marks the irreconcilable division of beliefs and ideals prevailing throughout the country. Republicans formed then a small minority of the French people, but Republicans such as Beaupuy represented the patriotism

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 711, 712.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 30, *ante*.

<sup>3</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 715, 716.

of France, whereas aristocratic reactionaries were all but traitors to their country. The facts again that the King had behind him zealous supporters among the officers of the army, and that most Frenchmen would, even in 1791, have been glad that reforms desired by the country should be carried through by the King, suggest that Louis the Sixteenth, if he had possessed any kingly virtues, might have made a successful fight for his crown. The so-called fatalism of history is often a delusion. It may be true that the revolutionary movement as a whole was irresistible. But this does not prove that the calamitous turn taken by that movement in France might not have been averted by wise conduct on the part of the King. You cannot, of course, expect that the ruler of a country, whether he be a King, a President, or a Premier, shall often be a man of transcendent genius. If Louis had possessed the dogged courage and the cunning sagacity of George the Third, or had shown anything like Victor Emmanuel's capacity for sympathizing with the desires of his people and for yielding to the counsel of Ministers abler than himself, Louis might have gone down to posterity as the hero instead of the victim of the Revolution. The idea that the Monarchy was, on the death of Louis the Fifteenth, itself a-dying is inculcated by Carlyle, but the military despotism of Napoleon and the long-surviving tradition of his popularity prove that republicanism had, at the end of the eighteenth century, struck no deep root in France.<sup>1</sup> However this may be, the policy of 'emigra-

<sup>1</sup> 'If a Henry the Fourth or a Frederick the Great had then mounted the throne, or if Lewis the Sixteenth had found for his Minister a Richelieu or a Pitt, a Cavour or a Bismarck, France would never have drifted into anarchy.' Lecky, *Hist. of England*, v, p. 441. Lecky here understates the force of his argument

tion', which is noted in the foregoing verses, and no doubt with indignation, by Wordsworth, shows the absence of common sense no less than of patriotism on the part of the nobility.<sup>1</sup> The desertion of France and alliance with foreign invaders had the twofold effect of at once weakening the royal cause by removing Royalists prepared to support the King, and at the same time of bringing both upon the *émigrés* and the King, for whom they fought, the unpardonable disgrace of attempting to restore the power of the Throne by the aid of foreign armies.

We can feel with the poet the impossibility of describing such a crisis.

Oh! laughter for the page that would reflect  
To future times the face of what now is!<sup>2</sup>

We can well understand that meanwhile

The land all swarmed with passion, like a plain  
Devoured by locusts,—Carra, Gorsas,—add  
A hundred other names, forgotten now,  
Nor to be heard of more; yet, they were powers,  
Like earthquakes, shocks repeated day by day,  
And felt through every nook of town and field.<sup>2</sup>

Wordsworth returned to Paris in October, 1792, within little more than a month after the September Massacres. The Monarchy had fallen on the 10th of August. The King himself and his wife and family were imprisoned.

against historical fatalism. The plain truth is that Louis the Sixteenth, though possessed of some private virtues, showed not a single talent becoming a King. It is quite conceivable that Louis the Eighteenth, though there is little about him to admire, might in 1789 have made a better fight in defence of his crown than did his elder though infinitely duller brother. See on the character of Louis the Sixteenth, Belloc, *The French Revolution*, pp. 37-45.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 34, *ante*.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, p. 712.



The deliberate murder by hired ruffians of unarmed prisoners, unconvicted of any crime, had already aroused the deserved execration of the civilized world. For five days and nights the slaughter went on uninterruptedly. The Legislative Assembly was sitting. Neither the righteousness of 'Roland the Just', nor the undoubted vigour and the somewhat dubious humanity or kindness of Danton, induced these leaders of the French people to put an end to, or at the risk even of their own lives to resist murders carried out by the lowest of hired assassins who numbered it is now ascertained not more than 150 men. We are told that the slaughter was designed by Marat. He may at least plead the miserable excuse that he was more than half a madman. It is extremely difficult for any man to believe that Danton did not, to say the very least, acquiesce in a policy of assassination which he thought might terrify the enemies of France and would certainly increase the political power of the Republicans of whom he was the leader.<sup>1</sup> What, we ask, was the impression which this terrible crime made at once upon a man so humane, so wise, and

<sup>1</sup> See especially as to the massacres of September, *Quinet*, i, pp. 376-391. 'Danton aussi se soumit à Marat; car, on a beau dire que l'on trouve partout l'influence de Danton dans les journées de septembre, le vrai est qu'il n'a nulle part l'initiative de la conception. Il obéit, il sert, il ferme honteusement les yeux, il laisse couler et tarir le sang. Il en garde aux mains une tache éternelle; mais ce n'est pas sa pensée qui s'exécute.' *Quinet, La Révolution*, i, p. 381. See *Taine, La Révolution*, ii, 283, 284, and p. 284, note 1. If Taine can be trusted, the moral responsibility of Danton for the massacres is past a doubt. See further H. Belloc's *Danton*, pp. 185-7. It is absolutely impossible to believe that Danton could not, if he had chosen, have prevented murders carried out for four or five days by hired assassins whom a hundred armed men under Danton's authority and guidance could easily have arrested. See also Madelin, *La Révolution*, pp. 254-60.

so conscientious as Wordsworth ? His own words, referring to the time of his return to Paris, give some answer to this question :

Lamentable crimes,  
'Tis true, had gone before this hour, dire work  
Of massacre, in which the senseless sword  
Was prayed to as a judge ; but these were past,  
Earth free from them for ever, as was thought,—  
Ephemeral monsters, to be seen but once !  
Things that could only show themselves and die.

The fear gone by  
Pressed on me almost like a fear to come.  
I thought of those September massacres,  
Divided from me by one little month,  
Saw them and touched : the rest was conjured up  
From tragic fictions or true history,  
Remembrances and dim admonishments.  
The horse is taught his manage, and no star  
Of wildest course but treads back his own steps ;  
For the spent hurricane the air provides  
As fierce a successor ; the tide retreats  
But to return out of its hiding-place  
In the great deep ; all things have second birth ;  
The earthquake is not satisfied at once ;  
And in this way I wrought upon myself,  
Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried,  
To the whole city, 'Sleep no more.' The trance  
Fled with the voice to which it had given birth ;  
But vainly comments of a calmer mind  
Promised soft peace and sweet forgetfulness.  
The place, all hushed and silent as it was,  
Appeared unfit for the repose of night,  
Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam.<sup>1</sup>

He felt the whole horror of these atrocious murders. He hated the dire work of massacre in which 'the senseless sword was prayed to as a judge'. But there were two thoughts which kept him from despair. The

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 718, 719.

State had assumed the body and the venerable name of a Republic. The crimes were past. Earth he hoped was free from them for ever. They seemed to be ephemeral monsters to be seen but once, things that could only show themselves and die. Cheered with this hope he came to Paris. To the men of to-day this attitude of hopefulness would be an impossibility. To Wordsworth and to the noblest among the leaders of the Revolution it was natural, it was, we may say, inevitable. It must be borne in mind that he was not in Paris during the massacres. They were hated by the Girondins. This detestation of an odious crime made an alliance between them and Danton an impossibility. Their terrible weakness in not resisting the massacres at all costs was probably not known, and certainly was not then clear to Wordsworth.

He thus describes the power of the Terrorists, and the course of the Terror :

In France, the men, who, for their desperate ends,  
Had plucked up mercy by the roots, were glad  
Of this new enemy.<sup>1</sup> Tyrants, strong before  
In wicked pleas, were strong as demons now ;  
And thus, on every side beset with foes,  
The goaded land waxed mad ; the crimes of few  
Spread into madness of the many ; blasts  
From hell came sanctified like airs from heaven.  
The sternness of the just, the faith of those  
Who doubted not that Providence had times  
Of vengeful retribution, theirs who throned  
The human Understanding paramount  
And made of that their God, the hopes of men  
Who were content to barter short-lived pangs  
For a paradise of ages, the blind rage  
Of insolent tempers, the light vanity

<sup>1</sup> i.e. the enmity of England which had gone to war with France.



Of intermeddlers, steady purposes  
 Of the suspicious, slips of the indiscreet,  
 And all the accidents of life were pressed  
 Into one service, busy with one work.  
 The Senate stood aghast, her prudence quenched,  
 Her wisdom stifled, and her justice scared,  
 Her frenzy only active to extol  
 Past outrages, and shape the way for new,  
 Which no one dared to oppose or mitigate.  
 Domestic carnage now filled the whole year  
 With feast-days; old men from the chimney-nook,  
 The maiden from the bosom of her love,  
 The mother from the cradle of her babe,  
 The warrior from the field—all perished, all—  
 Friends, enemies, of all parties, ages, ranks,  
 Head after head, and never heads enough  
 For those that bade them fall. . . .

Amid the depth  
 Of those enormities, even thinking minds  
 Forgot, at seasons, whence they had their being;  
 Forgot that such a sound was ever heard  
 As Liberty upon earth: yet all beneath  
 Her innocent authority was wrought,  
 Nor could have been, without her blessed name.<sup>1</sup>

These verses are the summary of Jacobin tyranny; they are full of meaning. It is well worth while to consider with some care two or three of the questions which Wordsworth's reminiscences of the Terror raise and partially answer.

First. Is his picture chargeable with any exaggeration?

This inquiry can be met with the most emphatic negative. In support of this assertion let me cite two passages from *The French Revolution* of Mr. Morse Stephens, of which the one refers to the executions at Paris under the judgements of the Revolutionary

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 723.

Tribunal and the other has reference to the effects of the Terror as it worked outside Paris :

From the death of the first victim Blanchelande on April 15, 1793, to the end of September, during a period of twenty-four weeks, 66 individuals were condemned to death by the Tribunal and executed, an average of nearly three a week. From the beginning of October to June 9 (Prairial 21) [1794], a period of thirty-six weeks, 1165 individuals were condemned to death and executed, an average of over 32 a week. And this increase was gradual, not sudden, as the figures for each month show. Still more striking is it to mention the figures for the period of seven weeks between 22 Prairial (June 10) and 9 Thermidor (July 27) [1794], during which time 1376 individuals were sent to the guillotine, or an average of over 196 a week. Comment on these figures is needless ; they show by themselves how steadily the Reign of Terror increased in severity, and to what a height it eventually developed.<sup>1</sup>

To sum up, it appears that the Terror was very much localized in the provinces, some districts and cities suffering severely, others not at all. M. Berriat Saint-Prix gives the number who perished on the guillotine, by 'noyades' and by 'fusillades' at 16,000, but this number is not to be trusted, because the number who perished by the latter two means of death are not and can never be known owing to the careless manner in which these executions *en masse* were carried out. He also includes in various round numbers the number of people killed during the sieges of Lyons and Marseilles, men who died fighting in war, and therefore certainly not victims or martyrs. M. Wallon, who, like M. Berriat Saint-Prix, writes in a tone distinctly unfavourable to the representatives on mission, but whose judgment may be taken as fairly accurate upon the whole, sums up that 14,807 condemnations to death were pronounced in the provinces before the fall of Robespierre, and 326 after that event.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Morse Stephens, *The French Revolution*, ii, p. 548.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.

Comment is in truth needless. Wordsworth's compressed but truthful account of the Terror requires no confirmation from the *pièces justificatives* amply supplied by Taine<sup>1</sup> and Quinet.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly. What were the causes of the Reign of Terror?

From an historical point of view one of Wordsworth's great merits is that he forces us to see that these causes were complicated. We must allow for the ambition of a few tyrants 'strong as demons', for 'blasts from hell sanctified like airs from heaven', for the sternness of the just, for the passion of fanatics who welcomed times of 'vengeful retribution', for enthusiasts content to barter short-lived pangs for a paradise of ages, for the blind rage of insolent men, for the vanity of intriguers, for a thousand accidents of life, which all combined to promote the one work of ruthless cruelty and horror.

He most certainly, too, points with statesmanlike sagacity to the one fact which, as every candid historian now sees, provides a main explanation, though not the justification, of the Reign of Terror. This fact is the invasion of France by foreign armies whose victory threatened the independence of the country and probably might have led to the partial dismemberment of France. French patriotism gave in 1789, neither for the first nor happily for the last time, new strength to a government which, whatever its name or its crimes,

<sup>1</sup> See Taine, *La France Contemporaine, La Révolution*, ii and iii.

<sup>2</sup> See Quinet, *La Révolution*, ii, especially pp. 132-342. I rely with confidence on the statements of my friend Mr. Morse Stephens. He writes with minute knowledge of revolutionary history, and no one who knows his book can suppose that he has the least tendency to condemn too strongly the Terrorists and their policy.

excuse  
An excuse  
as a title  
justified  
which  
denies  
place  
the government  
word  
context



strove heart and soul to rout foreign invaders who were supported by reactionists bent on restoring the worst features of the *ancien régime*.

Thirdly. Why did Frenchmen acquiesce in the Reign of Terror?

The inquiry is a perplexing one. For it is pretty clear that throughout the revolutionary movement the Republicans of France constituted a small minority of the people; it is certain that the Terror while it existed, as after it had ceased to exist, was hateful to the vast majority of Frenchmen. Wordsworth has supplied two answers to the problem before us which, though they may not constitute the whole truth, are, as far as they go, true. In the first place, the men who wished to overthrow the Jacobins could not, as long as the war lasted, attack the tyrants at Paris without weakening the arms of France and laying the country open to the armies of Prussia, of Austria, and of England. Hence in exact proportion as the Terrorists became strong as demons, their opponents lost the strength for resistance. Every foe of the Terrorists looked like a foe of his country. Lafayette, who throughout his life was the idol of liberty-loving Republicans, and who wished to play the part of Washington; Dumouriez, the skilful soldier and cunning diplomat, who sought prematurely to occupy the place which was awaiting Napoleon; Danton, who in the eyes of many writers is held to have been the one statesman among the revolutionists; the Girondins, strong as they were in parliamentary eloquence and full as they were of virtuous ambition—each and all of them when they attacked the Jacobins met with unpopularity, failure, ruin, and in most cases with death. When at last Robespierre was attacked

with success and lost at once his power and his life, his assailants were men as deeply pledged as himself to resist foreign invaders, and, what is certainly noteworthy, the danger of the foreign invasion being crowned with success was every day diminishing. Till France was safe the men who tried to end the Terror were themselves tormented by the fear that the destruction of despotism at Paris might mean the defeat and ruin of France. No doubt the charge of treason brought against the men and women whom Robespierre sent before the Revolutionary Tribunal was often at once unfounded and untrue, but the boldest of their number, such for example as was Danton, must have felt weakened by the sense that he was surrounded by crowds who held him to be a traitor.

In the second place, Wordsworth truly saw and points out that the cause of the Terror, as of every woe which afflicted France, was to be found far less in the immediate circumstances of the day than in

a terrific reservoir of guilt

And ignorance filled up from age to age,  
That could no longer hold its loathsome charge,  
But burst and spread in deluge through the land.<sup>1</sup>

These words, which Wordsworth with 'devout humility' attributes to the possession by him of the spirit given to the ancient Prophets, admit of various interpretations. Still, however interpreted, they prove the poet to have intuitively perceived, with the wisest of modern historians, that the enormities of the Reign of Terror were closely connected with the crimes of past generations. The Jacobins inherited the worst traditions and revived with exaggeration the most

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 725.

tyrannical among the habits of the ancient monarchy<sup>1</sup>; and the respectable middle classes paid to any power which gained for a time governmental authority in Paris the same servile obedience which they had been accustomed to render to the servants of the king.<sup>2</sup>

It is worth remark that Wordsworth had probably heard and perhaps admired Burke even before his year's stay in France. He had heard him launch forth against all systems built on abstract rights, keen ridicule, and proclaim the majesty of institutes and laws hallowed by time.<sup>3</sup>

Wordsworth in regard to France applies the historical method of Burke more wisely than did his teacher; he remembered, what Burke never properly understood, that the crimes of the Revolution had a close connexion with the vices of the *ancien régime*, and saw what Burke (less excusably) overlooked, that every attack on the independence of France rallied Frenchmen round the Jacobins, who with all their cruelties were the defenders of the country.

Another explanation of Frenchmen's acquiescence in the Reign of Terror may, curiously enough, be gained from Goldsmith. He fully perceived that the love of sympathy was at once the weakness as also the charm of the French character:

<sup>1</sup> 'On a ramassé l'arme du passé pour défendre le présent. Les cages de fer et les Tristan l'Hermite de Louis XI, les échafauds de Richelieu, les proscriptions en masse de Louis XIV, voilà l'arsenal où a puisé la Révolution. Par la Terreur, les hommes nouveaux redeviennent subitement, à leur insu, des hommes anciens.' Quinet, *La Révolution*, ii. 195.

<sup>2</sup> This traditional submissiveness goes very far to explain the incapacity of humane Parisians to terminate or to punish the massacres of September. Compare especially Quinet, i. 376-86.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 68, *post*.



It gives their follies also room to rise ;  
For praise too dearly lov'd, or warmly sought,  
Enfeebles all internal strength of thought.  
And the weak soul, within itself unblest,  
Leans for all pleasure on another's breast.

The mind still turns where shifting fashion draws,  
Nor weighs the solid worth of self-applause.<sup>1</sup>

But sympathetic fear is a passion as strong and real as sympathetic valour, and the very sympathetic enthusiasm, which led and is leading the armies of France to heroic victory in the field of war, might during the Terror, among the populace of Paris, the best of whom were employed in resisting armed invaders, easily be turned into sympathetic panic under the oppression of the Terrorists and the apparently triumphant advance of Prussian and Austrian armies.

Fourthly. Did the Reign of Terror save France ?

This question may seem to Englishmen of the twentieth century hardly worth raising. We look upon the Terror as simply detestable. The verdict of common sense coincides with the verdict of ordinary humanity. Nobody can believe for a moment that the massacres or—to use the plain language of Belloc—the ‘murders’ of September averted the advance of the Prussians towards Paris. Nobody can now seriously maintain that the execution of men, of women, and occasionally of children, innocent of any crime whatever, could really have contributed towards the defence of France. Yet the very horrors of the Terror excite in some minds an indisposition to believe that the execution of thousands of innocent persons brought no benefit whatever to France or to the world. It so happens, too, that Englishmen’s

<sup>1</sup> *The Traveller*, Goldsmith’s Works, ii. 47.

ideas as to the Reign of Terror are mainly derived from the dramatic pictures of the Revolution painted by Carlyle. But, according to a very able editor of Carlyle's *French Revolution*,

Carlyle makes the great but natural mistake, if not of attributing the victories to the Terror, yet of attributing the Terror and the victories to the same source. It is the greatest service to History of the greatest of modern French historians (M. Sorel) to have proved that the victories were in spite of, not because of, the Terror.<sup>1</sup>

Wordsworth at any rate has not a word to say in favour of the Terrorists or in extenuation of their crimes.

(C) *The fall of Robespierre and its effect on the judgement of Wordsworth.*

Wordsworth has thus recorded his feeling, when, on a beautiful day and in the midst of the Lake country, he heard the news of the fall and death of Robespierre<sup>2</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, edited by C. R. Fletcher, pp. 148, 149.

<sup>2</sup> The despotic authority of Robespierre is one of the most unaccountable phenomena presented by the French Revolution. He was a man of admittedly small intellectual power. On this point writers so different as Carlyle, Quinet, Taine, and, among recent authors, Belloc, are in substance agreed. He lacked the physical courage which is commonly possessed by leaders of men. It is, however, certain that he was adored by the Jacobins, and that just before his fall it was thought by many observers that Robespierre's authority might be permanent. This belief was shared by at least one man of profound sagacity. Bonaparte was the best judge of human character then to be found in France; he sought and obtained the patronage of Robespierre. And Bonaparte would never have attached himself to a patron whose power seemed tottering towards its fall. As it was Bonaparte placed his own life in peril through his connexion with the two Robespierres.

Great was my transport, deep my gratitude  
 To everlasting Justice, by this fiat  
 Made manifest. 'Come now, ye golden times,'  
 Said I forth-pouring on those open sands  
 A hymn of triumph: 'as the morning comes  
 From out the bosom of the night, come ye:  
 Thus far our trust is verified; behold!  
 They who with clumsy desperation brought  
 A river of Blood, and preached that nothing else  
 Could cleanse the Augean stable, by the might  
 Of their own helper have been swept away;  
 Their madness stands declared and visible;  
 Elsewhere will safety now be sought, and earth  
 March firmly towards righteousness and peace.'<sup>1</sup>

We pass here from the historical to the autobiographical importance of *The Prelude*.

We must note that even temporary despair about France did not come upon Wordsworth as the result of the Reign of Terror. It is no small proof of his sane calm-mindedness that the judicial murder of the Girondins in whom he trusted did not shake his confidence in the blessings of liberty. He never for a moment ceased to deplore the war between England and France as long as England was, in his eyes, fighting against the independence of France and the freedom of Frenchmen. Even the *coup d'état* of the eighteenth of Brumaire aroused probably less indignation in the mind of Wordsworth than in the minds of some Whigs who

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 726, 727. This splendid hymn of triumph perplexes modern critics. They cannot realize the extent to which the joy of the revolutionary dawn still possessed Wordsworth's imagination; they wonder that the horrors of the Terror left him still full of hope that the earth might 'march firmly towards righteousness and peace'. But this tremendous hopefulness constitutes in fact more than half the strength of Wordsworth, and is a virtue which in times of trouble is of inestimable value to any man destined to guide mankind.



did not know France as thoroughly as he did. He still in 1802

grieved for Bonaparté with a vain  
And an unthinking grief!<sup>1</sup>

And in this he was not far wrong. He knew that the overthrow of the Directorial Government was the liberation of France from the rule of men as lawless, as tyrannical, and as cruel as the Terrorists, and far less competent than Bonaparte to provide for the safety and prosperity of France. He contrasted indeed the unreality which marred the celebration of young Bonaparte's birthday with the genuine fervour of the federal festival, and wrote at Calais :

Far other show  
My youth here witnessed, in a prouder time ;  
The senselessness of joy was then sublime !  
Happy is he, who caring not for Pope,  
Consul, or King, can sound himself to know  
The destiny of Man, and live in hope.<sup>2</sup>

But his hopes for France, though not his faith in freedom, which never wavered, were shaken not by Bonaparte's *coup d'état*, or even by his despotic rule at home, but both by the fact that

Now become oppressors in their turn,  
Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence  
For one of conquest, losing sight of all  
Which they had struggled for : upmounted now,  
Openly in the eye of earth and heaven  
The scale of Liberty.<sup>3</sup>

and by

the catastrophe (for so they dream,  
And nothing less), when, finally to close

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 304.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 730.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

And seal up all the gains of France, a Pope  
Is summoned in, to crown an Emperor—  
This last opprobrium, when we see a people,  
That once looked up in faith, as if to Heaven  
For manna, take a lesson from the dog  
Returning to his vomit; when the sun  
That rose in splendour, was alive, and moved  
In exultation with a living pomp  
Of clouds—his glory's natural retinue—  
Hath dropped all functions by the gods bestowed,  
And, turned into a gewgaw, a machine,  
Sets like an Opera phantom.<sup>1</sup>

The effect of the Reign of Terror and of the whole Revolution on Wordsworth is noteworthy. It proves the statesmanlike calmness and firmness of his judgement. This point has been thus put by a critic of insight: 'It is the sleepless self-control [of Wordsworth] which, when once the first sweep of the storm was passed, enabled him to stand firm against every prompting of weakness from within, and every discouragement that the wreck of his civic hopes might but too easily have fastened upon him from without. It was always evident that, through the fiery trial of the Revolution and the Napoleonic tyranny, he kept a saner judgement, as well as a more heroic temper, than any man in this country, probably than any save a very small remnant, in the whole of Europe.'<sup>2</sup> This goes to the root of the whole matter. By one of those historical mistakes (originating in the violence of party passion) which one may treat as almost amusing, a young man of twenty-one who 'kept his head, when all about him were losing theirs', has been thought to be the victim of

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 732.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Language Review*, article by C. Vaughan, vol. xi, pp. 487, 488.

a most violent change in opinion, and has been sometimes painted as coming near to a traitor or a turncoat. The simple truth is that in his feeling with regard to the Revolution itself Wordsworth hardly changed at all. He fully sympathized with the splendid hopes of that astounding era. The ruin and death of the political friends to whom he was personally attached did not shake his buoyant hope that the world might now march on to righteousness and peace. He thus left France with two convictions, neither of which did he ever in substance abandon. The one was that France had a right, as had every other independent nation, to choose for herself her own form of government; the other was that England, the land of freedom, had no right whatever to invade the soil of France as the ally of kings who intended to force upon her a government which she detested, and hoped to wrest from her some part of her territory. These two unchangeable convictions of Wordsworth in 1792 must constantly be borne in mind by any reader who wishes to understand the statesmanship of Wordsworth in 1802.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORDSWORTH'S POLITICAL CONVICTIONS (1792-1802)<sup>1</sup>

WORDSWORTH returned from France to England towards the end of 1792. He was then a young man of not quite twenty-two years of age. He was quite unknown to the public. He probably appeared in the eyes of his family to be a clever young man who showed an inability for settling down to any profession by which he might earn a livelihood. He was avowedly a Republican, and this at a moment when any democrat was by respectable Englishmen called a Jacobin, and was suspected at once of religious infidelity and of political treason. He had no means whatever of influencing public opinion, but it is characteristic of his intense interest in public affairs that in 1793 he composed an elaborate *Apology for the French Revolution* in the shape of a letter to Bishop Watson,<sup>2</sup> who, though a Whig, had, in an appendix to a published sermon, attacked both the conduct and the political principles of the revolutionary leaders. This *Apology* is a piece of vigorous writing; it proves Wordsworth's general acceptance<sup>3</sup> in 1793 of

<sup>1</sup> See Acland, *Patriotic Poetry of Wordsworth*, and Wordsworth's *Tract on the Convention of Cintra* (published in 1809), republished by the Oxford University Press, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> See Grosart, i, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> The tone of the pamphlet is in some respects moderate (see *ibid.*, p. 10), and though the tone is naturally hostile to Burke, it is possible that Wordsworth in reading Burke had begun to adopt

the dogmas held by every French revolutionist. The strongest among Wordsworth's convictions were, as already pointed out, that France had a right to choose for herself her own form of government, and that England had in 1793 no right to invade France and force upon her a government which she detested. To both of these convictions Wordsworth clung through life. In 1802 Wordsworth, then a man of over thirty-one and at the very height of his power as a poet and a thinker, began pressing upon England the necessity and the duty of waging a remorseless war against France for the overthrow of that Napoleonic despotism which threatened destruction to the freedom of England and of every other European country which still possessed or claimed national independence. My object is to consider and explain the development, rather than the variation, of Wordsworth's political creed during the years from 1793 (the declaration of war between France and England) to 1802 (the Treaty of Amiens), which rendered it not only natural but almost inevitable, that the man who loathed the war between England and France in 1793 should from 1802 onwards press upon England with heart and soul the necessity, or rather the duty, of war against Napoleon, supported though the despot were by the people of France.

To understand the essential consistency of Wordsworth's political doctrine my readers must then bear in mind three leading circumstances.

First. In February, 1793, war was declared between England and France.

unconsciously something of the latter's political philosophy. See pp. 59-70, *post*. The *Apology* was never published till after Wordsworth's death.

This act on the part of England was, in the eyes of Wordsworth, a political error and a moral crime. England to him was clearly joining a body of kings, who cared nothing for liberty, in the attempt to impose upon France a form of government rejected by the French people. In favour of Wordsworth's view there is a great deal to be said. He certainly advocated and anticipated the practice or rule which, since his time, has in general been adopted by English statesmen. They have again and again seen the wisdom of not interfering with the right of Frenchmen to choose the form of government which suits them best. Wordsworth also perceived, what was certainly true, that the advance into France of hostile armies added immensely to the power of the Terrorists, or of any leaders who had become rulers of Paris. Pitt's admitted disinclination to make war, and his subsequent efforts in later years, though before 1802, to negotiate with France for peace, tell, as far as they go, in favour of the opinion that the war ought to have been deferred till it became manifestly necessary for the defence of England. The Peace of Amiens itself showed that the war commenced by Pitt in 1793 had failed to attain its object. France under Napoleon was a far more formidable power than the France ruled by revolutionists in 1793.<sup>1</sup> It would, however, be unfair to deny that ministers, such as Pitt, who in 1793 treated France as already an aggressive power desiring to obtain an extension of French territory, were not without reasons for thinking that war was all but a necessity. But it is needless here to determine whether the Eng-

<sup>1</sup> The calm judgement of Macaulay (1844) substantially agrees with the passionate insight of Wordsworth (1793). See article on Barère, Macaulay, *Writings and Speeches* (ed. 1871), pp. 296, 297.



lish advocates or the opponents, such as Wordsworth, of the war, were on the whole in the right. My immediate object is to show the immense effect which the declaration of war by England produced upon Wordsworth's convictions. In this matter it is best as far as possible to follow Wordsworth's own words in describing his own feelings.

From the beginning of the Revolution his heart had been won by France. He was convinced that the prosperity of France would promote the welfare of mankind. He thus lost for a time his interest in English affairs. Hence he became indifferent even to the failure of Englishmen to abolish the slave trade.<sup>1</sup>

For I brought with me the faith  
That, if France prospered, good men would not long  
Pay fruitless worship to humanity,  
And this most rotten branch of human shame,  
Object, so seemed it, of superfluous pains,  
Would fall together with its parent tree.<sup>2</sup>

He still maintained calm loyalty to his country.

But England's declaration of war filled him with horror and indignation. As to this his own words are clear :

What, then, were my emotions, when in arms  
Britain put forth her free-born strength in league,  
Oh, pity and shame! with those confederate Powers ;  
Not in my single self alone I found,  
But in the minds of all ingenuous youth,  
Change and subversion from that hour.<sup>2</sup>

Oh! much have they to account for, who could tear,  
By violence, at one decisive rent,  
From the best youth in England their dear pride,  
Their joy, in England ; this, too, at a time

<sup>1</sup> Probably in 1791.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, p. 722.

In which worst losses easily might wean  
The best of names, when patriotic love  
Did of itself in modesty give way,  
Like the Precursor when the Deity  
Is come Whose harbinger he was ; a time  
In which apostasy from ancient faith  
Seemed but conversion to a higher creed ;  
Within a season dangerous and wild,  
A time when sage Experience would have snatched  
Flowers out of any hedge-row to compose  
A chaplet in contempt of his grey locks.<sup>1</sup>

Love for France became with Wordsworth a passion.  
Loyalty to his native land changed into something very  
like hatred of England as the ally of oppressors. This  
statement is not too strong :

I rejoiced,  
Yea, afterwards—truth most painful to record!—  
Exulted, in the triumph of my soul,  
When Englishmen by thousands were o'erthrown,  
Left without glory on the field, or driven,  
Brave hearts! to shameful flight.<sup>1</sup>

Take again his description of his feelings when in  
some country church :

When, in the congregation bending all  
To their great Father, prayers were offered up,  
Or praises for our country's victories ;  
And, 'mid the simple worshippers, perchance  
I only, like an uninvited guest  
Whom no one owned, sate silent, shall I add,  
Fed on the day of vengeance yet to come.<sup>1</sup>

Take finally this account by Wordsworth of the  
working in his own mind of indignation at the attack  
by England on the liberty of France :

This threw me first out of the pale of love ;  
Soured and corrupted, upwards to the source,  
My sentiments ; was not, as hitherto,

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 722.

A swallowing up of lesser things in great,  
 But change of them into their contraries ;  
 And thus a way was opened for mistakes  
 And false conclusions, in degree as gross,  
 In kind more dangerous.<sup>1</sup>

This terrific conflict between the inborn love of England on the one hand and vehement sympathy with France on the other, as long as she was the defender of liberty, was to Wordsworth the tragedy of the war.

Secondly. At some date not to be fixed with precision, but probably not later than 1798, it became clear to Wordsworth that France had become not the defender, but the assailant, of national liberty :

Now, become oppressors in their turn,  
 Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence  
 For one of conquest, losing sight of all  
 Which they had struggled for : upmounted now,  
 Openly in the eye of earth and heaven,  
 The scale of Liberty.<sup>2</sup>

Wordsworth at first, it is true, refused to admit this unwelcome conclusion, and for a time clung more strongly than ever to his old opinion. But his keen eye for actual facts made him, though unwillingly, accept the conclusion that France was fighting no longer for independence but for conquest. The strength of this belief was increased from 1798 by the events of each succeeding year, and in fact was firmly established long before the great catastrophe of 1804 occurred,

when, finally to close  
 And seal up all the gains of France, a Pope  
 Is summoned in to crown an Emperor.<sup>3</sup>

Before this event, and indeed soon after 1798, when he

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 729, 730.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 730.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 732.



perceived the altered character of the war with France, Wordsworth's full patriotic love for England had been restored and increased. The poems with regard to Lucy, whatever the circumstances, whether real or imaginary, which gave rise to them, were composed in 1799, and in Germany. We may feel sure that the verse—


I travelled among unknown men,  
In lands beyond the sea;  
Nor, England, did I know till then  
What love I bore to thee,<sup>1</sup>

expressed Wordsworth's passionate, though not indiscriminating, love for his mother country. Note, however, that the feelings which led the poet from or after 1800 to urge on the war with France, imply no diminution in his continuous condemnation of the war with France from 1793 to about 1798. We witness a change of circumstances, but not the slightest change of principle.

Thirdly. Wordsworth's political creed became by degrees deeply affected by the teaching of Burke.

This statement looks at first like the maintenance of a hopeless paradox, but it is in reality a truism which ought never to be overlooked in an estimate of Wordsworth's political doctrine from 1802 to 1815. From an outside point of view, indeed, the career and the opinions of these two eminent men are marked far more strongly by contrast than by likeness. Burke gained his fame as a parliamentarian. He lived in the atmosphere of parliamentary debate. He was far more closely mixed up than his admirers could wish in party conflicts, and, what is often the same thing, in political intrigue. He was a most eminent man of letters whose speeches and

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 109.


 writings form a lasting and much-read part of English literature, but he never published <sup>1</sup> a single verse known to or remembered by Englishmen. Wordsworth, on the other hand, knew nothing of the parliamentary side of English politics. He was a teacher,<sup>2</sup> a prophet, and a poet. He never, to the best of my knowledge, delivered a single public speech. For a short time, not extending at the most over thirteen or fifteen years, he attempted by a very small number of writings to guide the public life of his country. His patriotic sonnets stand high among the poetry of England, and his *Tract on the Convention of Cintra* will obtain a certain number of thoughtful and intelligent readers as long as men remain interested in the parliamentary history of England. But no one doubts that the permanent fame of Wordsworth will depend upon his poetry. Then too, on the greatest subject which gave rise to discussion during the long life of Wordsworth and the shorter life of Burke, the two men held diametrically opposed opinions. Burke from the very beginning looked upon the proceedings in France with distrust. 'He had not', it has been well said with regard to the French Revolution, 'a moment of enthusiasm or sympathy of which to repent.'<sup>3</sup> Wordsworth never forgot the early days when it was bliss to be alive, and to be young was very heaven.<sup>4</sup> The taking of the Bastille, the federal feast, the exultation of good men and his own passionate delight at the fall of Robespierre, were memories cherished by a poet and a thinker who

<sup>1</sup> See, as to copies of verses sent to a friend, Morley's *Burke*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> 'I have not', he writes to a friend, 'written down to the level of superficial observers and unthinking minds. Every great poet is a teacher: I wish either to be considered as a teacher, or as nothing.' Harper, ii. 158.

<sup>3</sup> Morley's *Burke*, p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 21, *ante*.

had shared more deeply than almost any other Englishman in the joys and the hopes of the early revolutionary conflict. Even in 1793-4, as witness the letter to Bishop Watson, Wordsworth was in feeling a Republican and a Girondin. Yet, for all this, the influence of Burke upon Wordsworth is a matter of certainty. The evidence in favour of this assertion is strong. The contrast between the simple and direct manner of Wordsworth's *Apology for the French Revolution*, written in 1793, and the complex style of his *Tract on the Convention of Cintra*, published in 1809, needs some explanation. This lies near at hand. The *Tract* reads like a book composed by a writer who for years had been immersed in the reading of Burke. Ardent admirers have claimed indeed, whether rightly or wrongly, that the *Tract* equals in eloquence Burke's best writing. Less enthusiastic critics may feel that the simplicity, the vigour, and the directness which characterize the letter to Bishop Watson are more natural to Wordsworth, and better suited to the purposes of a pamphleteer, than are the long and intricate sentences of the *Tract on the Convention of Cintra*. The admission indeed of Wordsworth's latest biographer that 'the highly elaborate style of Wordsworth's tract has kept it hitherto, and probably will always keep it, from being much read',<sup>1</sup> coupled with the fact that sentences in the tract 'not seldom run for a whole page', is the severest condemnation of the style in which impressive thoughts are expressed in a book meant to arouse public attention. A pamphlet addressed to the whole body of reading Englishmen must have been written in order to be read, and therefore cannot be rightly applauded on the ground of its being to many English

<sup>1</sup> Harper, ii. 181.



readers unreadable. Wordsworth, it is true, may be said to have imitated Burke in the complexity and in the weightiness of his thoughts. But then not a sentence of Burke is ever, to any educated Englishman, hard to read. However this may be, the contrast in style between the *Apology for the French Revolution* and the style of the *Tract*, does suggest indebtedness to Burke. And the force of this inference derived from style is increased by considerations based on the likeness between Wordsworth's way of thinking, displayed in the famous *Tract*, and Burke's general line of thought. That Wordsworth derived from his teacher an appreciation of what would now be called the historical method, is undeniable. What has been less observed, though it is equally important, is that Wordsworth shares with, and has to a certain extent derived from, Burke a tendency towards what Lord Morley has happily termed 'mysticism'. This vague expression is the best name for a feeling which has in its nature much of vagueness, and which is incapable of precise definition. Both the orator and the poet have the keen sense of something of mystery which underlies a wise man's thoughts on all matters of profound importance. This point of likeness is better shown by example than by definition. In the very wisest of Burke's works, that is to say in the whole of the pamphlets or speeches bearing on affairs with America, all of which might be designated as attempts to bring about conciliation with America, Burke bases his whole argument upon a profound study of human nature. He tries to impress upon his English hearers the fact that the inhabitants of New England, from the traditions of independence in matters both civil and religious, derived from their Puritan

ancestors, were certain to resist any attempt on the part of the British Parliament, where they were not represented, to impose upon them the burden, however slight, of taxation. He shows also that the Southern planters, though many of them belonging to the Church of England, just because they were slave-owners, felt that a white man, whether rich or poor, was the member of an aristocracy, and that every white man would fight to the death against any claim of Parliament to interfere with that perfect independence which with him was essential to his dignity as a free citizen. Burke attempted, and in vain, to persuade ordinary Englishmen that the one path towards reconciliation was to understand the character and the sentiments of the citizens of the Thirteen Colonies. Wordsworth some thirty-five years later tried with more, but yet with imperfect, success to persuade the Englishmen of his day that the only way to gain the full advantage of our alliance with the inhabitants of the Spanish Peninsula against Napoleon was to study and understand their character, their sentiments, even their prejudices, and that policy, in short, ought to be based upon knowledge of human nature. Turn to another point of comparison. Burke knew politicians as they actually were. He entertained the firmest conviction that, in the management of great affairs, and in dealing with any sudden crisis in a country's history, no men were to be less trusted than ordinary officials well versed in the petty arts of ordinary business or of political management. Consider the whole effect of these words uttered by Burke in 1774 :

It may be truly said, that men too much conversant in office, are rarely minds of remarkable enlargement. Their habits of office are apt to give them a turn to

think the substance of business not to be much more important than the forms in which it is conducted. These forms are adapted to ordinary occasions; and therefore persons who are nurtured in office, do admirably well, as long as things go on in their common order; but when the high roads are broken up, and the waters out, when a new and troubled scene is opened, and the file affords no precedent, then it is that a greater knowledge of mankind, and a far more extensive comprehension of things is requisite than ever office gave, or than office can ever give.<sup>1</sup>

Wordsworth in his *Tract* pursues exactly the same line of thought, though it is impossible to give more than a compressed account of his argument. He affirms that 'nothing but a knowledge of human nature directing the operation of our government can give it a right to an intimate association with a cause [namely, the resistance of the inhabitants of the Spanish Peninsula to the French invaders] which is that of human nature'. But this knowledge of human nature, he holds, is not possessed by everyday politicians. For these practical statesmen assume too much credit to themselves for their ability to see into the motives and manage the selfish passions of their agents and dependents, and for the skill with which they can baffle or resist the aims of their opponents, whilst they know nothing of the instincts of natural and social man: the deeper emotions; the simpler feelings; the spacious range of the disinterested imagination; the pride in one's country for one's country's sake, whose service has not been a mere formal profession, and the mind, is therefore left in a state of dignity only to be surpassed by noble and generous service. He concludes therefore that, to use

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Burke's Speech on American Taxation, *Works*, ii. 390.



his own words, 'it is plain *à priori* that the minds of statesmen and courtiers are unfavourable to the growth of this knowledge' of human nature which is the essential basis of true statesmanship.<sup>1</sup> Thus Wordsworth not only follows Burke in rating very low the astuteness of so-called practical statesmen, but carries his contemptuous censure beyond the limits imposed upon the language, and possibly even upon the feeling, of a politician himself versed in the actual management of affairs and deeply imbued in the sentiment and the habits of party government. Add one other point of likeness between Burke and Wordsworth which may possibly seem fanciful, but, in my judgement, is real. In both these men, from the beginning to the end of their lives as known to the public, there existed an element of real but latent conservatism which contrasts—though the contrast is rather apparent than real—with the vehemence of what we may call the early liberalism of Burke and also with the youthful revolutionary aspirations of Wordsworth. And in each case this contrast has often been felt, though with little reason, to mark an inconsistency between the popular sympathies of youth and the alleged toryism of old age. Fifty years ago it was felt to be something of a paradox to maintain that Burke was, in his essential views of life and of policy, the same man when he withstood the inroads of George the Third upon the rights secured to Englishmen under the English constitution, as when he, with even more violence, withstood every attempt of Fox and his followers to introduce from France revolutionary principles more destructive of the rational

<sup>1</sup> See, for Wordsworth's whole argument, the *Tract*, pp. 129-140.

freedom enjoyed by Englishmen under our constitution than could have been any extension of the royal prerogative meditated or desired by George the Third. The essential consistency of Burke's political principles has been finally established as a truth or a truism by Lord Morley.<sup>1</sup> It is, at any rate, worth while considering whether we may not trace a very similar sort of consistency between the political ideas of Wordsworth, the Girondin of 1793, and Wordsworth, the so-called Tory of 1820 or 1830. It is worth while to note the traces of conservatism, even in that *Apology for the French Revolution*, which some Liberals look upon as his clearest expression of the adoption by him of the whole revolutionary creed. It is the work, remember, of quite a young man ; it is the work of an avowed Republican ; it is the work of an English Republican inflamed with the warmest enthusiasm for France, and with intense indignation at the declaration by England of war with the French Republic. The language, as I have already pointed out, is marked by a moderation which would not have been found in the anti-revolutionary pamphlets of Burke, or in the reply to them by Tom Paine. But the words on which I wish to insist read as follows :

④ Appearing, as I do, the advocate of Republicanism, let me not be misunderstood. I am well aware, from the abuse of the executive power in States, that there is not a single European nation but what affords a melancholy proof that if, at this moment, the original authority of the people should be restored, all that could be expected from such restoration would in the beginning be but a change of tyranny.<sup>2</sup>

These words show on the whole moderation and good

<sup>1</sup> See Morley's *Burke* (English Men of Letters), pp. 145-8.

<sup>2</sup> Grosart, i. 10, 11.

sense. They are not in accordance with the theory, so dear to revolutionists, of natural rights. They would not have been applauded in a Club of Girondins. They would not have been tolerated for a moment in any Club of Jacobins. They betray the conservative side of the Republican Wordsworth in 1793 and prepare us for the Wordsworth of 1802, who found more friends among Tories than among Whigs.

It is of supreme importance for intelligently appreciating the statesmanship of Wordsworth, to recognize to the full the intellectual, and even the moral, connexion between Burke and Wordsworth. This connexion between two men of transcendent genius reflects in truth glory upon each. You can hardly give higher praise to Burke than the statement that his teaching freed Wordsworth, and thousands of other Englishmen with him, from revolutionary sophisms and delusions; you cannot better sum up the peculiarity of Wordsworth's political creed than by the statement that he imbibed the best truths which Burke could teach, and yet at the same time retained unshaken that complete faith in freedom, and that hope of human progress, which formed the truest part of the revolutionary dogmas. You can then see the explanation and the truth of the assertion which is insisted upon throughout this treatise, that Wordsworth (at any rate during the period of his statesmanlike activity) was neither a Whig nor a Tory. The difference which in spirit divided Wordsworth from each of the two parties which, till 1832 at least, alone contended for the government of England, is in nothing seen more strikingly than in his peculiar attitude towards Fox and towards Burke.

In 1806 he composed for Fox, then on his death-bed,



who was idolized by the Whigs but detested or hardly tolerated by most Tories,<sup>1</sup> the finest elegy ever composed by a great poet for a man whom he deemed to be a mighty statesman :

And many thousands now are sad—  
Wait the fulfilment of their fear;  
For he must die who is their stay,  
Their glory disappear.

A Power is passing from the earth  
To breathless Nature's dark abyss;  
But when the Mighty pass away<sup>2</sup>  
What is it more than this—

That Man, who is from God sent forth,  
Doth yet again to God return?—  
Such ebb and flow must ever be,  
Then wherefore should we mourn?<sup>3</sup>

Turn now to Wordsworth's portrait of Burke :

This is no trifler, no short-flighted wit,  
No stammerer of a minute, painfully  
Delivered. No! the Orator hath yoked  
The Hours, like young Aurora, to his car:  
Thrice welcome Presence! how can patience e'er

<sup>1</sup> Scott somewhat tardily discovered that 'Fox a Briton died', but the fine though laboured eulogy embodied in the introduction to *Marmion* (1808) hardly induced some Whigs to forget that in the boisterous banquet at Edinburgh in triumph for the acquittal of Lord Melville, a song had been sung, written by Scott, the last verse of which all but concluded with the words, 'Tally-ho to the Fox.'

<sup>2</sup> My friend, Miss H. Darbishire, has pointed out to me a curious difference in the words of this line in different editions of Wordsworth's poems. In the edition of 1807 it stands as here printed. In subsequent editions up to Wordsworth's death it reads, 'But when the great and good depart'. And this reading is followed by Hutchinson, p. 581 (ed. 1895). But the original reading reappears in Matthew Arnold's *Poems of Wordsworth*, chosen and edited by him in 1879.

<sup>3</sup> *Poems of Wordsworth*, by Matthew Arnold (1910), 299.

Grow weary of attending on a track  
That kindles with such glory? All are charmed,  
Astonished ; like a hero in romance,  
He winds away his never-ending horn ;  
Words follow words, sense seems to follow sense :  
What memory and what logic! till the strain  
Transcendent, superhuman as it seemed,  
Grows tedious even in a young man's ear.

Genius of Burke! forgive the pen seduced  
By specious wonders, and too slow to tell  
Of what the ingenuous, what bewildered men,  
Beginning to mistrust their boastful guides,  
And wise men, willing to grow wiser, caught,  
Rapt auditors! from thy most eloquent tongue—  
Now mute, for ever mute in the cold grave. (X)  
I see him,—old, but vigorous in age,—  
Stand like an oak whose stag-horn branches start  
Out of its leafy brow, the more to awe  
The younger brethren of the grove. But some—  
While he forewarns, denounces, launches forth,  
Against all systems built on abstract rights,  
Keen ridicule ; the majesty proclaims  
Of Institutes and Laws, hallowed by time ;  
Declares the vital power of social ties  
Endeared by Custom ; and with high disdain,  
Exploding upstart Theory, insists  
Upon the allegiance to which men are born—  
Some—say at once a froward multitude—  
Murmur (for truth is hated, where not loved)  
As the winds fret within the Æolian cave,  
Galled by their monarch's chain. The times were big  
With ominous change, which, night by night, provoked  
Keen struggles, and black clouds of passion raised ;  
But memorable moments intervened,  
When Wisdom, like the Goddess from Jove's brain,  
Broke forth in armour of resplendent words,  
Startling the Synod. Could a youth, and one  
In ancient story versed, whose breast had heaved  
Under the weight of classic eloquence,  
Sit, see, and hear, unthankful, uninspired? <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 694, 695.

These lines were written apparently not later than 1804 ; they were at any rate written after Burke's death (1797) at a time when he was canonized by the Tories as the most powerful and formidable foe of the French Revolution, and detested by the Whigs as a renegade or a traitor. Yet this portrait is the noblest and most appreciative monument which could be raised by a statesman such as Wordsworth to the eloquence and the wisdom of Burke.

The political doctrine of Wordsworth had already passed beyond the comprehension either of Tories or of Whigs.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE STATESMANSHIP OF WORDSWORTH (1802-1815)

AN examination of Wordsworth's action as a statesman makes it necessary, in the first place, to realize the condition of England from 1802 (Peace of Amiens) to 1815 (Battle of Waterloo), and, next, to consider the character of Wordsworth's statesmanship.

#### (A) *The State of England, 1802-1815.*

It must be constantly remembered that from the year 1800 till almost 1814 most Englishmen feared, and all but expected, the triumph of Bonaparte. This period of national depression has been hidden from Englishmen of to-day by the memories of Trafalgar, of Leipzig, and of Waterloo. But the dread was not in itself unreasonable. The war against France, which ended with the transitory Peace of Amiens, had, in spite of England's naval successes, turned out a failure. It had increased instead of restricting the power of France. It left her supreme among European States. Napoleon ruled a far larger domain,<sup>1</sup> and exerted a far more extensive authority than had ever been obtained by Louis the Fourteenth. Even before the Treaty of Amiens was signed he had treated England with contempt, if not

<sup>1</sup> In 1811 it was possible to walk from Rome to Hamburg without passing through any country which was not technically part of the French Empire!

with insult. He had caused himself to be proclaimed ruler of Northern Italy. He ruled Switzerland with despotic authority, and, in the eyes of Wordsworth at least, had destroyed every vestige of Swiss freedom, not less than of Swiss independence. In 1798 a savage rebellion had broken out in Ireland; a change of wind would have enabled Hoche to land a French army in support of the rebels; no man could have ventured to predict that one of the most capable among French generals, at the head of picked French soldiers, and supported by thousands of Irishmen, might not have conquered Ireland. Yet in 1801 the mob of London frantically applauded the French envoy who brought hopes of peace. It may indeed be true that 'Fox a Briton died', but the Whigs as a party had no belief in the war, and had persuaded themselves that Napoleon represented the cause of freedom. Here and there Whigs of eminence, such as were Sydney Smith and Lord John Russell, came to favour the war; but the parliamentary opposition grudged the money spent upon our armies abroad, and encouraged the delusion that Bonaparte was on land invincible. The seizure of the Danish fleet by England was the saving of the country, but Whig moralists condemned it as a flagrant violation of international law, and some Whigs, it is said, saw in the taking of Moscow by Bonaparte nothing but a sign of the Emperor's irresistible power. To appreciate at its right value Wordsworth's foresight as a statesman it is absolutely necessary to realize the moral depression, not to say hopelessness, amounting almost to cowardice, which weighed upon Englishmen not only up to the beginning of the Peninsular War, but in truth until the English successes in Spain had attracted the attention

of the whole world. This spiritlessness caused by the continued triumph of Bonaparte threatened ruin to England.

Continental opinion greatly underrated the fighting power of English soldiers, and many Englishmen were victims to the delusion, that while English sailors were always sure of victory by sea, English soldiers could not hope to defeat on land the armies of Bonaparte,<sup>1</sup> at any rate when commanded by Bonaparte himself. Pitt himself must have felt doubtful of final success, for in 1795 he had offered proposals for peace to France; in 1797 he had renewed peace negotiations with France. The Peace of Amiens in 1802, though not made by Pitt, was not opposed by him. This Peace was the visible sign of British failure in the long contest with France. Nor were the years that followed the renewal of the war in 1803 wanting in events which excited legitimate distrust in the character both of our statesmen and of our generals. In 1805-6 Lord Melville, then First Lord of the Admiralty, and possessing greater power in the Cabinet than any man except Pitt, was accused of negligence and embezzlement in the management of the Navy. He was impeached. He obtained a deserved acquittal. Still some of the most respectable members of the House of Commons, among others Wilberforce, voted for the impeachment. They held,

<sup>1</sup> This idea prevailed, although in 1799 Sir Sidney Smith had forced Bonaparte to retreat from before Acre; in 1801 British soldiers under British generals had expelled the French army from Egypt, and in 1806 Sir John Stuart had defeated French troops in Calabria. Consider carefully Pasley's essay on 'The Military Policy and Institutions of the British Empire', published in 1810, with the object of encouraging England, from a military point of view, in resistance to Napoleon.



not without good reason, that one of England's leading statesmen had, when enjoying high office, laid himself open to grave suspicion of high crimes and misdemeanours which, if proved, would have covered him with disgrace.<sup>1</sup> In 1808 the Duke of York was commander-in-chief. He had become entangled with an adventuress, Mary Anne Clarke. She made money out of her intimacy with the Duke by promising promotion to officers who paid for her recommendation. In 1809 a Committee of the House of Commons inquired into the whole matter. The Duke, it was proved, had shown reprehensible carelessness in his dealings with Mrs. Clarke. He was acquitted by the House of Commons of having been himself guilty of any corrupt practice. He was morally compelled to resign his high office.<sup>2</sup> In 1808 the Convention of Cintra, though in fact the result of a striking victory gained by Sir Arthur Wellesley,<sup>3</sup> most gravely discredited the generals who had prevented him from reaping the fruits of his success. In 1809 the great expedition to Walcheren under Lord Chatham turned out a complete failure.

The Whigs, as already noted, had as a body brought themselves to believe that Napoleon ought to be considered as the defender of liberty. They condemned the war with France, and naturally considered that the success of England was hopeless. Nothing gives a stronger impression of the misery produced among Englishmen by hope deferred for more than twenty years, than some lines of Scott, published January 2,

<sup>1</sup> *State Trials*, xxix, p. 550.

<sup>2</sup> He was in 1811 reinstated in the office of commander-in-chief with general approval.

<sup>3</sup> Known to all time as the Duke of Wellington.

1815. Even the joy of the tyrant's overthrow could not make one of the most hopeful of men and resolute of Tories forget the miserable hours of hopelessness, coming near to despair, endured by the opponents of Imperial despotism, or, in Scott's own words, the

Long, long course of darkness, doubts, and fears!  
The heart-sick faintness of the hope delay'd,  
The waste, the woe, the bloodshed, and the tears  
That track'd with terror twenty rolling years.<sup>1</sup>

(B) *Nature of Wordsworth's Statesmanship.*

From 1802 Wordsworth, on the subject of the war with France, entirely agreed for practical purposes with the best Tories of his time and with some few of the best and the wisest among the Whigs. He felt that to put an end to the Treaty of Amiens and to carry on the war against Napoleonic despotism was for England both a necessity and a duty. He entirely disagreed with the Whig Opposition, who, preaching a policy of peace, clung to the delusion that somehow Napoleon represented the cause of Liberty. But he perceived with far more clearness than did even the most patriotic of Tories, both the needs of the English people and the absolute necessity of persisting in the war and basing it upon the true principles of international right and justice. Let it be further noted that Wordsworth's statesmanship was a living policy; it grew and developed gradually between 1802 and 1809, between the publication, that is to say, of his earliest patriotic sonnets and the publication of his *Tract on the Convention of Cintra*, which incidentally sets forth the essence of his statesmanship.

<sup>1</sup> Scott, *Lord of the Isles*, Canto VI, st. i, published January 2, 1815.

In respect then of Wordsworth's statesmanship, let us consider two questions: First, what was its general character? second, what were the specific principles which sum up the statesmanship of Wordsworth?

(1) The general character of Wordsworth's statesmanship. — This may be mainly seen from his patriotic sonnets published at different times between 1801 and 1815, and may be thus described: He was a moralist inspired with absolute faith in the triumph of righteousness. He was a prophet who preached and believed that national failure arose from the faults or sins of a nation and of the men who composed it. He therefore insisted with perpetual reiteration that in the war against Bonaparte, which was a war against injustice and oppression, the inability of England to overthrow the power of a tyrant arose from the errors or crimes of England and from the personal faults of Englishmen. He was a nationalist who anticipated the nationalism of the Victorian era; he was assured that, on the one hand, the independence of England could be maintained only by asserting the national independence of other European States, and that, on the other hand, the independence of every other European country, e.g. of Spain, of Italy, of Switzerland, or of Germany, would never be safe until England had succeeded in maintaining her own independence by the destruction of Bonaparte's Empire. Wordsworth was, lastly, and above all, an English patriot. During long years, whilst tyranny was triumphant throughout continental Europe, and, in all countries, including England, received from many men of distinction abject and degrading adulation, he never for a moment faltered in the belief that, if England rose to the performance of her one supreme duty,



namely the destruction of the Napoleonic Empire, she might absolutely count upon final victory. For the understanding of Wordsworth's statesmanship it is necessary to perceive the blending together in his soul of three different sentiments. These were prophetic severity and foresight—intense love for the independence of all truly national States—ardent English patriotism. He was at once a Prophet, a Nationalist, and a Patriot. He enjoined the reform of English life or the renovation of English virtues ; the maintenance or the creation of independence for every country united by national feeling, and above all the destruction of that Napoleonic tyranny which, whatever benefits it might incidentally confer upon the world, meant the triumph of despotism and, in the greater part of Europe, of despotism supported by foreign arms. This cold summary of Wordsworth's statesmanship means, according to the knowledge or the ignorance of a reader, either everything or nothing. Its true significance can be gathered only from the words of Wordsworth read in close connexion with the circumstances of his time.

Note first the prophetic denunciation of England's sins and weaknesses, and its gradual transition into faith in England if she rises to the height of her solemn duty :

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour :  
England hath need of thee : she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters : altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men ;  
Oh ! raise us up, return to us again ;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power. (1802.)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 307.

O Friend! I know not which way I must look  
 For comfort, being, as I am, opprest,  
 To think that now our life is only drest  
 For show; mean handy-work of craftsman, cook,  
 Or groom!—We must run glittering like a brook  
 In the open sunshine, or we are unblest:  
 The wealthiest man among us is the best:  
 No grandeur now in nature or in book  
 Delights us. Rapine, avarice, expense,  
 This is idolatry; and these we adore:  
 Plain living and high thinking are no more:  
 The homely beauty of the good old cause  
 Is gone; our peace, our fearful innocence,  
 And pure religion breathing household laws. (1802.)<sup>1</sup>

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England! the time is come when thou shouldst wean  
 Thy heart from its emasculating food;  
 The truth should now be better understood;  
 Old things have been unsettled; we have seen  
 Fair seed-time, better harvest might have been  
 But for thy trespasses; and, at this day,  
 If for Greece, Egypt, India, Africa,  
 Aught good were destined, thou wouldst step between.  
 England! all nations in this charge agree:  
 But worse, more ignorant in love and hate,  
 Far, far more abject is thine Enemy:  
 Therefore the wise pray for thee, though the freight  
 Of thy offences be a heavy weight:  
 Oh grief, that Earth's best hopes rest all with Thee!  
 (1803.)<sup>2</sup>

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When I have borne in memory what has tamed  
 Great Nations, how ennobling thoughts depart  
 When men change swords for ledgers, and desert  
 The student's bower for gold, some fears unnamed  
 I had, my Country—am I to be blamed?  
 Now, when I think of thee, and what thou art,  
 Verily, in the bottom of my heart  
 Of those unfilial fears I am ashamed.

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 306, 307.<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 309.

For dearly must we prize thee ; we who find  
 In thee a bulwark for the cause of men ;  
 And I by my affection was beguiled :  
 What wonder if a Poet now and then,  
 Among the many movements of his mind,  
 Felt for thee as a lover or a child ! (1803.)<sup>1</sup>

Though the sonnets dedicated to Liberty rise gradually into hope,<sup>2</sup> and even into assurance of England's irresistible strength, when once she shall have become the strenuous, even though she be the solitary, defender of freedom for herself and for Europe, the true offence of England, which Wordsworth finds it difficult to pardon, is that in his judgement she has from time to time been opposed to the freedom of other countries :

In the course of the last thirty years [he writes] we have seen two wars waged against Liberty—the American War, and the war against the French People in the early stages of their Revolution. . . . And, for what more especially belongs to ourselves at this time [1810] we may affirm—that the same presumptuous irreverence of the principles of justice, and blank insensibility to the affections of human nature, which determined the conduct of our government in those two wars *against* liberty, have continued to accompany its exertions in the present struggle *for* liberty,—and have rendered them fruitless.<sup>3</sup>

But here Wordsworth's sense both of England's duties, some of which she has neglected, and of England's strength passes into Wordsworth's nationalism. In his famous *Tract on the Convention of Cintra*, published in 1809, Wordsworth expresses his own wish to see Spain, Italy, France (which was then a mere part of the Napoleonic Empire), and Germany formed into independent nations. This is decisive as to Wordsworth's

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 307, 308.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 84, 85, 127, *post*.

<sup>3</sup> The *Tract*, p. 140.



developed nationalism. But in truth the whole of the *Tract* must be read and re-read in order to perceive how completely he anticipated the enthusiasm for nationality which was fully developed towards the middle of the nineteenth century. His invective against this Convention of Cintra in reality rests upon and is, in the judgement of later historians, to a great extent justified<sup>1</sup> by the contemptuous disregard which the Convention showed for the feelings, for the self-respect, and for the honour, both of the Portuguese and of the Spaniards.

Wordsworth was enthusiastic on behalf of national independence, whether it was connected with loyalty to a king or with enthusiasm for a republic. To the end of his life he condemned the invasion of France by England and the First Coalition in 1793; for the whole of the allies contemplated some kind of interference with the self-government of France, and some of the continental powers aimed at the acquisition of French territory and the dismemberment of France. Wordsworth's position, whatever its merits, was, as regards France, consistent.<sup>2</sup> He was a Republican who saw that the French Revolution, looked at from its best side, was a step in the progress of mankind. He came, however, under the influence of many of Burke's ideas.<sup>3</sup> He thus inevitably and rightly turned into a Nationalist. He anticipated by more than twenty years the nationalism of Mazzini.<sup>4</sup> For the doctrine of nationalism, as conceived

<sup>1</sup> See Oman, *Peninsular War*, vol. i. 274-6.

<sup>2</sup> See letter to Loch, written 1821, Knight, *Life of William Wordsworth* (1889), iii. 58, 59. (Cf. Hale White, p. 10.)

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 59-70, *ante*.

<sup>4</sup> See the sonnet of 1837, *From the Alban Hills*, Hutchinson, p. 360, and p. 115, *post*.

of by Wordsworth and as developed in later years by Mazzini, meant a great deal more than the mere admiration of patriotism. Ever since the days of Marathon and Thermopylae, and indeed from a much earlier date, there have existed plenty of men and women able to admire the bravery of heroes dying in defence of their own native land. But modern Nationalists have done much more than teach that patriotism is a virtue. They have spread far and wide the political creed that every State, at any rate in Europe, ought, if possible, to be inhabited by citizens who were, or felt themselves to be, one nation, and that no nation should be governed by any foreign power. This doctrine, whence it follows that every independent nation should support, and if necessary be prepared to defend, the independence of any other nation, was, as one may see at a glance, fatal to the existence of a State such as the Austrian Empire. This was certainly a novel and, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a startling dogma. Wordsworth had the great merit not only of anticipating by many years the nationalist idea which became dominant towards the middle of the nineteenth century, but also of creating a new doctrine without mingling it with some of the errors with which it has been combined by its most distinguished advocates. He never supposed that nationalism was essentially connected with republicanism. He would, if he had lived in 1860, have deemed Cavour a much safer guide than Mazzini.<sup>1</sup> We may, however, conjecture that his special sympathy would have been reserved for Garibaldi, who first fought in defence of the Roman Republic and held at bay the armies of

<sup>1</sup> See *Tract*, pp. 167-70, for Wordsworth's appreciation of the true relation between nationalism and good government.

France, and next, at the highest point of his career, liberated Sicily and Naples in order to increase the authority of the King of a united Italy. He avoided the error, by which many English Whigs were misled, of imagining that the people of Italy or of Germany cared more for constitutional freedom than for national unity. His prophetic foresight that zeal for nationality might be converted, or perverted, into the passion for national power extended by preeminence in the use of arms, and might thus destroy throughout an independent nation the love of real freedom, was hardly understood in free countries such as the United States, England, or France, until its truth was demonstrated by the War of 1914.<sup>1</sup>

On Wordsworth's English patriotism it is needless to insist. It is patent in every line written by him in reference to the Napoleonic War. It may be summed up in one sonnet:

<sup>1</sup> Take as a sign of the originality of Wordsworth's nationalism, and of the extent to which his statesmanship was in advance of the age in which he propounded it, the expression by Dr. Arnold of Rugby of his 'tenderness for the Austrian Government' and also this sentence written by Arnold in 1830: 'I was delighted also with Venice; most of all delighted to see the secret prisons of the old aristocracy converted into lumber rooms, and to see German soldiers exercising authority in that place, which was once the very focus of moral degradation of the Italian race, the seat of falsehood and ignorance, and cruelty.'—Stanley's *Life of Arnold*, 5th edition, vol. i, p. 275. Note these dates. In 1810 Wordsworth had mastered the principles of nationalism, and had probably adopted them in 1802. Mazzini was born in 1805, and advocated nationalism about 1830-1. In 1830 Arnold rejoiced in the despotism of Austria in Venice. In 1849 Clough, a favourite pupil of Arnold's, mourned over the defeat of Italian patriots by Austrians. Before 1870 nationalism was adopted by all English Liberals. Wordsworth anticipated the full growth of nationalism by at least forty years.



Another year !—another deadly blow !  
 Another mighty Empire overthrown !  
 And We are left, or shall be left, alone ;  
 The last that dare to struggle with the Foe.  
 'Tis well ! from this day forward we shall know  
 That in ourselves our safety must be sought ;  
 That by our own right hands it must be wrought ;  
 That we must stand unpropped, or be laid low.  
 O dastard whom such foretaste doth not cheer !  
 We shall exult, if they who rule the land  
 Be men who hold its many blessings dear,  
 Wise, upright, valiant ; not a servile band,  
 Who are to judge of danger which they fear,  
 And honour which they do not understand. (1806.)<sup>1</sup>

What is not always noted is that his English patriotism is so closely united with his faith in the blessing for every country of national independence that in his mind the two sentiments are almost identified with each other. Let the following sonnets be taken as illustrations of such blended feelings :

Once did She hold the gorgeous east in fee ;  
 And was the safeguard of the west : the worth  
 Of Venice did not fall below her birth,  
 Venice, the eldest Child of Liberty.  
 She was a maiden City, bright and free ;  
 No guile seduced, no force could violate ;  
 And, when she took unto herself a Mate,  
 She must espouse the everlasting Sea.  
 And what if she had seen those glories fade,  
 Those titles vanish, and that strength decay ;  
 Yet shall some tribute of regret be paid  
 When her long life hath reached its final day :  
 Men are we, and must grieve when even the Shade  
 Of that which once was great is passed away. (1802.)<sup>2</sup>

Two Voices are there ; one is of the sea,  
 One of the mountains ; each a mighty Voice :  
 In both from age to age thou didst rejoice,

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 304, 305.

They were thy chosen music, Liberty!  
 There came a Tyrant, and with holy glee  
 Thou fought'st against him; but hast vainly striven:  
 Thou from thy Alpine holds at length art driven,  
 Where not a torrent murmurs heard by thee.  
 Of one deep bliss thine ear hath been bereft:  
 Then cleave, O cleave to that which still is left;  
 For, high-souled Maid, what sorrow would it be  
 That Mountain floods should thunder as before,  
 And Ocean bellow from his rocky shore,  
 And neither awful Voice be heard by thee! (1807).<sup>1</sup>

In each poem he is preoccupied with the indignant thought that Bonaparte might subdue the one country which more truly even than Venice had 'held the gorgeous East in fee', and the one country which, for more years than even Switzerland, had already defended the last and impregnable home of freedom.

It is well worth while to note the way in which Wordsworth's nationalism more and more expanded between 1802 and 1809 and, further, was adapted to the main and immediate object of at once raising the spirit of England and elevating the moral tone of her foreign policy. For this purpose nothing was more suitable than the whole line of Wordsworth's patriotic sonnets. They are the finest war songs ever composed by a patriot to stir up the valour and the nobility of his country; they might be termed the psalms of England, and like the Psalter they combine penitence for past errors with confidence in final victory based on the belief in the final triumph of righteousness. They contain not a word which is mean, ignoble, or savage.<sup>2</sup> The appreciation of Wordsworth as a patriot and a

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Coleridge's '*France—An Ode*' with Wordsworth's sonnet on the extinction of the Venetian Republic or with his

nationalist is best given in the words of a later poet in whom Mazzini had kindled a genuine faith in Italian nationalism :

As the poet of high-minded loyalty to his native land, Wordsworth stands alone above all his compeers and successors: royalist and conservative as he appeared, he never really ceased, while his power of song was unimpaired, to be in the deepest and most literal sense a republican; a citizen to whom the commonweal—the 'common good of all', for which Shakespeare's ideal patriot shed Caesar's blood less willingly than his own—was the one thing worthy of any man's and all men's entire devotion.<sup>1</sup>

sonnet on the subjugation of Switzerland, and the extraordinary power of Wordsworth is at once felt.

Contrast Wordsworth's nobility and calmness with these jingling rhymes in which Southey, though a really humane man, expressed his savage delight in the sufferings of Bonaparte and his soldiers in the retreat from Moscow :

The Emperor Nap he would set off  
On a summer excursion to Moscow :  
The fields were green, and the sky was blue,  
Morableu! Parbleu!  
What a pleasant excursion to Moscow !  
Too cold upon the road was he  
Too hot had he been at Moscow :  
But colder and hotter he may be,  
For the grave is colder than Moscovy :  
And a place there is to be kept in view,  
Where the fire is red and the brimstone blue,  
Morableu! Parbleu !  
Which he must go to,  
If the Pope say true.  
If he does not in time look about him :  
Where his namesake almost  
He may have for his Host.  
He has reckon'd too long without him,  
If that host get him in Purgatory,  
He won't leave him there alone with his glory :  
But there he must stay for a very long day,  
For from thence there is no stealing away  
As there was on the road from Moscow. (1813.)

(*The Poetical Works of Robert Southey*, vi. (ed. 1838) 217, 222.)

<sup>1</sup> Swinburne, *Miscellanies* (1886 ed.), p. 130.



(2) The specific principles of Wordsworth's statesmanship.—These principles are finally explained and defended in the *Tract on the Convention of Cintra*.

From the *Tract* it is absolutely clear that Wordsworth in 1809 held and taught the following doctrines of nationalism :

First. National independence has, to every European State which has become possessed thereof, been the necessary condition or source of the greatest of blessings, such for example as freedom, and progress in the path of civilization.

Thus national independence is, according to Wordsworth, essential to the possession of civil liberty :

The difference, between inbred oppression and that which is from without [i. e. imposed by foreigners], is *essential*; inasmuch as the former does not exclude, from the minds of a people, the feeling of being self-governed; does not imply (as the latter does, when patiently submitted to) an abandonment of the first duty imposed by the faculty of reason. . . .

If a country have put on chains of its own forging; in the name of virtue, let it be conscious that to itself it is accountable: let it not have cause to look beyond its own limits for reproof: and—in the name of humanity—if it be self-depressed, let it have its pride and some hope within itself. The poorest Peasant, in an unsubdued land, feels this pride. I do not appeal to the example of Britain or of Switzerland, for the one is free, and the other lately was free (and, I trust, will ere long be so again): but talk with the Swede; and you will see the joy he finds in these sensations. With him animal courage (the substitute for many and the friend of all the manly virtues) has space to move in: and is at once elevated by his imagination, and softened by his affections: it is invigorated also; for the whole courage of his Country is in his breast.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Tract*, pp. 167-9.

To national independence we may attribute the high spirit of Spain. In virtue of it 'a numerous Nation, determined to be free, may effect its purpose in despite of the mightiest power which a foreign Invader can bring against it'.<sup>1</sup> We see in the case of Spain this close inter-connexion between national independence and every other political blessing:

The first end to be secured by Spain is riddance of the enemy: the second, permanent independence: and the third, a free constitution of government; which will give their main (though far from sole) value to the other two; and without which little more than a formal independence, and perhaps scarcely that, can be secured.<sup>2</sup>

The permanence of any advance, even in the material comfort, depends upon national independence, or at any rate upon the spirit, by which alone such independence can be maintained.<sup>3</sup> And freedom in the long run, combined with independence, will put an end to laws and customs which have become oppressive and a hindrance to human progress. Superstition itself will, in Wordsworth's judgement, gradually be removed by national independence, combined, one must suppose, with the possession of personal freedom. He remembers that from the beginning, English well-wishers to the cause for which the inhabitants of the Peninsula are fighting, have been discouraged by the 'superstition' said to prevail amongst them. He rebukes the fears of such doubters in words which are very characteristic of the poet, and of his intense belief in the benign influence of liberty and of independence. They transcend the moral faith of to-day and are not entirely in accordance with the experience of the later nineteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171-2.

Still, they contain an idea which deserves respect and attention :

Short-sighted despondency! Whatever mixture of superstition there might be in the religious faith or devotional practices of the Spaniards, this must have necessarily been transmuted by that triumphant power, wherever that power was felt, which grows out of intense moral suffering—from the moment in which it coalesces with fervent hope. The chains of bigotry, which enthralled the mind, must have been turned into armour to defend and weapons to annoy. Wherever the heaving and effort of freedom was spread, purification must have followed it. And the types and ancient instruments of error, where emancipated men shewed their foreheads to the day, must have become a language and a ceremony of imagination ; expressing, consecrating, and invigorating, the most pure deductions of Reason and the holiest feelings of universal Nature.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly. Every independent nation, and above all England, is interested in the maintenance of the national independence of every other country.

We should have, Wordsworth deems, at the head of affairs

a General and a Ministry whose policy would be comprehensive enough to perceive that the true welfare of Britain is best promoted by the independence, freedom, and honour of other Nations ; and that it is only by the diffusion and prevalence of these virtues that French Tyranny can be ultimately reduced ; or the influence of France over the rest of Europe brought within its natural and reasonable limits.<sup>2</sup>

No doubt, in the use of this language, as elsewhere, Wordsworth, whose point of view is at its best always sensible and practical, rather than doctrinaire and abstract, is writing with an eye to the immediate interest

<sup>1</sup> See *Tract*, pp. 115, 116.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.



of Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal in the destruction of French tyranny. But it is equally true that his practical policy is intentionally and inevitably bound up with his fervent belief in nationalism. Hence arises with him a further thought hardly shared by the most foreseeing statesmen or the best thinkers of his time, though later in the nineteenth century it was accepted by all nationalists. He ardently desires national unity both for Italy and for Germany. 'It will', to his mind, 'be a happy day for Europe, when the natives of Italy and the natives of Germany (whose duty is, in like manner, indicated to them) shall each dissolve the pernicious barriers which divide them, and form themselves into a mighty People.'<sup>1</sup>

Could the barriers be dissolved which have divided the one nation [Italy] into Neapolitans, Tuscans, Venetians, &c., and the other [Germany] into Prussians, Hanoverians, &c., and could they once be taught to feel their strength, the French would be driven back into their own land immediately. I wish to see Spain, Italy, France, Germany, formed into independent nations; nor have I any desire to reduce the power of France further than may be necessary for that end.<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly. No State ought to possess irresistible military power so as to menace the legitimate independence of other countries.

On this point the language of Wordsworth is emphatic; in 1917 it may seem to have been prophetic:

Woe be to that country whose military power is irresistible! I deprecate such an event for Great Britain scarcely less than for any other land. . . . If a nation have nothing to oppose or to fear without, it cannot escape decay and concussion within. Universal triumph and absolute security soon betray a state into abandonment of that discipline, civil and military, by which its

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

victories were secured. If the time should ever come when this island shall have no more formidable enemies by land than it has at this moment [1811] by sea, the extinction of all that it previously contained of good and great would soon follow.<sup>1</sup>

Fourthly. The French Empire under Napoleon possesses almost irresistible power, and is opposed to the very principle of national independence; England, therefore, ought to wage war with France until French power is reduced within reasonable bounds.

Wordsworth's words are on this point as strong as they are clear:

We ought not to make peace with France, on any account, till she is humiliated, and her power brought within reasonable bounds. It is our duty and our interest to be at war with her. . . . Nor have I any desire to reduce the power of France further than may be necessary for that end.<sup>2</sup>

Wordsworth was no believer in the possibility of ending a war against a nation bent on establishing its supremacy throughout Europe, by a peace equally acceptable to the assailants and to the supporters of despotism.

Fifthly. It is desirable to create a new balance of power.

The materials of a new balance of power exist in the language, and name, and territory of Spain, in those of France, and those of Italy, Germany, Russia, and the British Isles. The smaller states must disappear, and merge in the large nations and wide-spread languages. The possibility of this remodelling of Europe I see clearly; earnestly do I pray for it.<sup>3</sup>

Wordsworth here was distinctly in advance of the statesmen belonging to his own age. He was also

<sup>1</sup> See *Tract*, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 229, 237.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

(strange as it may sound) in advance of many later Nationalists. Wellington, Castlereagh, and Metternich, and other leaders who guided the Congress of Vienna, were in favour of a balance of power. But they had no sympathy whatever with the idea, that every independent State should be inhabited by a people who felt themselves or desired to be one nation. The Congress therefore aimed at constituting a balance of power which had nothing to do with nationality. This end they strove to attain by giving to the rulers of a limited number of States something like equal power. They hoped thus to prevent the rise of some one omnipotent State. Nationalists soon perceived that such a balance of power was opposed to their hope of dividing Europe into countries each of which should represent a separate nationality. They therefore scouted and derided the very idea of a balance of power. Wordsworth perceived the partial truth contained in each of these opposed ideals. He contemplated a balance of power which should exist to guarantee the independence of each separate nation. Wordsworth further, whilst he anticipated the leading articles of the nationalist creed, annexed to them certain limitations which, if attended to, would have corrected or averted the errors committed by some later prophets of nationalism. By the time when he published the *Tract* he had entirely got rid of the delusion that national independence was necessarily connected with any one form of constitution. A monarchy might clearly, in his eyes, as well create, preserve, or restore the national independence of a country as could a republic. Wordsworth, again, explicitly recognized that nations, such as Scotland and England,<sup>1</sup> inspired by a sentiment

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 163, 164, 168-70.



of separate nationality, which was the growth, in each case, of a history to which each nation looked back with pride, might rightly and wisely sacrifice something of their separate character in order to form the greater and more powerful nation of Great Britain. Unity is, in his eyes, well worth purchasing at some sacrifice of sentiment when unity immensely increases the security for national independence. He, with great wisdom, concerns himself far more with the maintenance or the restoration of the independence of existing nations than with the creation of new nationalities. His attitude is to a great extent, if not wholly, represented by the words of one of the most eminent among the men who learned much from Wordsworth:

I do not the least enter into the Kossuth notion about our duty to the 'Nationalities'; if there is any good in them, if they are nations, and not nationalities, they will help themselves. Our business, so far as I can gather from history, has never been to make a crusade for them, but to resist whatever power in Spain, France, Russia, set itself up to break down national boundaries and establish a universal empire. It has been no choice with us, whether we would do this or not; we have been forced to do it, when we were most reasonably and remarkably reluctant. God has sent us upon the errand, if we were ever so inclined to escape in a ship of Tarshish and look after our commercial prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

Look for a moment at the statesmanship of Wordsworth (1802-1815) as a whole. It assuredly, at the very lowest estimate, achieved two aims: It did much to remove the depression of Englishmen and to restore to them their inherited daring and hopefulness. It next anticipated for England the reasonable nationalism which,

<sup>1</sup> *Life of F. D. Maurice*, ii. 251.

if attended to, might guide the foreign policy of England for the greater part of the nineteenth century. And these results were achieved, not through any appeal to popular vanity or ambition, but through recalling to Englishmen the hereditary greatness of England as exhibited by her noblest sons, and through identifying the necessity to save England from subjugation by the Napoleonic Empire with the noble duty of preserving or restoring the independence of every European State.

## CHAPTER V

### QUESTIONS AS TO THE STATESMANSHIP OF WORDSWORTH

FIRST Question. What was the immediate effect of the statesmanship of Wordsworth?

Its immediate effect was, with one exception, comparatively small. The sonnets, noble as they are, were not written for or read by the crowd. The *Tract*,<sup>1</sup> impressive as it is, could never have been easy reading; its sale was small; it certainly was not read by the mass of English electors. Wordsworth's labours certainly did not suddenly change the course of public opinion as did Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, when published in 1790, nor did they bring home to English parsons and others the imminent peril of a Napoleonic invasion with the same force as did the wit and the wisdom of Sydney Smith, when he published in 1807-8, '*The Letters to my brother Abraham who lives in the Country, by Peter Plymley.*'

Yet to this general statement there is one exception. Wordsworth's political teaching did produce one immediate effect of untold value. It brought into one line every man throughout the United Kingdom who detested the despotism of Bonaparte and recognized the duty of England to save herself by an unappeasable war against the aggression of the French Emperor,

<sup>1</sup> See particularly the Introduction to the *Tract*, pp. vii-xx.



and thereby to secure the independence of every European State menaced or enslaved by the gigantic power of the Empire. Scott, on reading the earlier part of Wordsworth's *Tract*,<sup>1</sup> writes: '*I much agree with him. Alas! we want everything but courage and virtue in this desperate contest. Skill, knowledge of mankind, ineffable unhesitating villany, combination of movement and combination of means, are with our adversary. We can only fight like mastiffs—boldly, blindly, and faithfully.*'<sup>2</sup> Tories, such as Scott, John Wilson, and Castlereagh, joined hands with revolutionists, such as had been Wordsworth and Coleridge, who had deprecated or detested a war which threatened the independence, and even the existence, of France. For English Tories and revolutionists alike could all sympathize with countries which at every risk dared to oppose the attacks of a foreign despot. Till the Peace of Amiens the war with France had been the work of a party, though of a party which represented the majority of Englishmen. When the Peace came to an end and certainly after the appearance of Wordsworth's pamphlet, the war commanded the warm support of England; and those Whigs who still opposed it rapidly sunk into a faction. The war was transformed from a war against France into a national war for the defence of England. This transformation was due in no small degree to Wordsworth's patriotic sonnets and to his *Tract on the Convention of Cintra*.

Second Question. Has the statesmanship of Wordsworth been justified by the subsequent events of the nineteenth century?

The short answer is that the foresight of Wordsworth

<sup>1</sup> Published in the *Courier*, 1808-9.

<sup>2</sup> Grosart, i, Preface, p. xiv.

is amply vindicated by the one fact that the foreign policy of England during the nineteenth century, in so far as it coincided with the statesmanship of Wordsworth, was markedly successful ; in so far as it deviated from his statesmanship, it ended in failure, or at best in very dubious success. This is the matter which best deserves our careful attention. His statesmanship, as we have seen, was founded on two principles : The first was avowedly the destruction at all costs of Napoleonic despotism ; the other was the adoption, within rational limits, of nationalism, which may roughly be defined as the maintenance of the independence of any State the people whereof are desirous and capable of constituting one nation. This principle, however, was with him clearly limited by the necessity of preventing each State from encroaching upon the independence of other States ; hence his proposed creation of a new balance of power.

The policy of England with regard to France coincided with, or at any rate soon came to coincide with, the statesmanship of Wordsworth. Napoleon died a prisoner at St. Helena, and his despotic Empire was overthrown past any possibility of true revival.<sup>1</sup> In consequence of the Congress of Vienna and treaties connected therewith, France, as regards her European territory, retained, subject to slight though perceptible changes, pretty nearly the limits by which she was bounded at the close of the *ancien régime*—i.e. at the beginning of 1790.<sup>2</sup> It soon became clear that England

<sup>1</sup> The restoration in 1852 of the Napoleonic dynasty showed, in its actual result, that the Imperial system, as it had existed in 1809, was dead.

<sup>2</sup> Losses on her part under such Treaties were to a certain

would never again wage war to hinder France from adopting any constitution accepted by the French people. In 1830 Englishmen welcomed the royalty of Louis Philippe with rapturous applause. In 1848 they recognized the authority of the Second Republic. In 1852 they did not oppose the re-establishment of the Napoleonic dynasty. In 1870 they acknowledged the Third Republic as a perfectly legitimate form of government. The conduct of England went far to establish, as a rule or custom of international law, that a Government accepted by the people of an independent State should be acknowledged by all other independent States. This statesmanship was pre-eminently successful. It produced first the maintenance of peace, next a condition of somewhat varying but gradually and on the whole increasing good-will, and lastly, within a century after the battle of Waterloo, a close and intimate alliance between England and France. The triumph of Wordsworth's statesmanship is here past a doubt.

The policy of England with regard to other countries often deviated most seriously from the statesmanship of Wordsworth. There were many reasons why English Governments found it hard to adopt Wordsworth's nationalism. Such adoption was inconsistent with the treaties resulting from the Congress of Vienna. They were meant to create a balance of power, but a balance resting on the interest of Governments, and not on the wishes either of peoples or of nations. Nor did any British party easily welcome Wordsworth's reverence for nationality. Tories sympathized with the national resistance of Spaniards and Germans to French invaders extent compensated for by gains. See *Historical Atlas of Europe*, map xiii, and note by G. W. Prothero.



led by Bonaparte, but, on the destruction of Bonaparte's Empire, Tories became very cool friends of nationalist movements when allied with revolution or republicanism. During the Great War the Whigs had, as a party, shown less favour than Tories to movements in favour of national independence. Even the invasion of Spain, though utterly lawless, might, they thought, give a blow to superstition and promote practical reforms. When the war had come to an end they honestly believed that the adoption of English constitutionalism, as finally perfected by the Reform Act of 1832, would bestow upon the people of any European State, however ill-governed, all the political blessings which could be desired by reasonable men. English Liberals, during the twenty or thirty years which followed the battle of Waterloo, favoured attempts by bodies of Englishmen to assist, by force of arms and otherwise, opponents of despotism in foreign countries. But the giving of such aid to one of the parties into which the people of an independent nation were divided, was at bottom inconsistent with the nationalism preached by Wordsworth. The Radicals again of the Manchester School held, that Free Trade and peace would, in the long run, be enough to promote and ensure the progressive improvement of every European State. They heartily adopted the so-called principle of non-intervention, and construed it as meaning that England should never intervene at all in foreign affairs, and almost as meaning that she should have no foreign policy whatever. But this dogma was not derived from Wordsworth. True it is, that towards the middle of the nineteenth century most Liberals awoke to the undoubted fact that the cause of nationalism was gaining

every day additional recruits, and was likely to produce tremendous changes ; and some leading Whigs, such as Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell, to their great credit, came very near, at any rate as regards Italy, to the adoption of nationalist doctrine. If, however, it is certain that as regards many Continental affairs England deviated greatly from the statesmanship of Wordsworth, it is equally certain that English policy, as regards such affairs, was not crowned with anything like complete success. The English people, however, or at any rate a considerable part of the English people, became by the middle of the nineteenth century more and more interested in nationalist movements. Cavour was to educated Englishmen almost the ideal of a patriotic statesman. Garibaldi was to Englishmen of all classes a popular hero. And, under the guidance of Palmerston, British policy did most certainly give aid and comfort to Italy in 1860 and 1861 ; one may doubt whether this help did not, in effect, go beyond anything which could fairly be called mere moral support. In any case the success with which English statesmen gained the friendship of Italians was due to the fact that the British people had, as regards Italy, come distinctly round to the statesmanship of Wordsworth. Yet, if you cast a glance over English foreign policy during the last hundred years, it is impossible to say that it has been as a whole successful. The plain truth is that the statesmen of England did not know how to deal with the nationalist movement which was gradually changing the whole condition of the Continent. European wars were mainly, if not exclusively, connected with the doctrine of nationalism. England then of necessity spoke with an uncertain voice. English ministers thrust upon the

Governments of Europe advice supported only by moral force, and tending at any rate up to 1848 towards suggestions that the adoption of English constitutionalism would, in every discontented State, reconcile the Government with its dissatisfied subjects. But moral force turned out in general to be no force at all, and England's advice was treated with disregard.

The Crimean War—the only Continental war in which England took part—was popular. It was hailed by the mass of the English people as an attack upon Russia—a Power which then supported despotism throughout Europe. The war did little or nothing in its technical results to aid nationalists. But the instinct of the people was in this instance sound. The Crimean War gave to Italy an opportunity for striking what turned out to be decisive blows in favour of Italian unity and freedom. Yet the English Government was unable to compel Bomba of Naples to observe towards his political opponents the rules of common humanity. The action, or the inaction, of England was of no good to Denmark, nor, at an earlier period, were the attempts of enthusiastic English Liberals to aid the cause of liberty in Spain or in Portugal of any avail. Few persons at the present moment will be inclined to hold that England's attitude in 1870 was satisfactory. It was certainly not the kind of attitude naturally suggested by the statesmanship of Wordsworth. We come then round to the conclusion that the foreign policy of England was, except in so far as it coincided with Wordsworth's statesmanship, a failure or certainly not a success.

Third Question. Why has Wordsworth not been recognized as the earliest of English Nationalists?

This failure of Wordsworth to obtain the fame due to



his statesmanship is attributable to two causes : The one is summed up in the words of Swinburne : He 'unconsciously anticipated the message of Mazzini' to Italy and to the world.<sup>1</sup> No man who studies Wordsworth's patriotic sonnets or his *Tract* can doubt the truth of this assertion made by one of the most distinguished among Mazzini's English disciples. But no student who has turned his thoughts towards the laws governing the development of public opinion will feel much surprise that a prophet who preaches half unconsciously a doctrine much in advance of his time, should, when it is at length reiterated by others and accepted by the world, miss the reputation due to its original author. Now Mazzini himself was born in 1805, four years before the publication of Wordsworth's *Tract*, and Mazzini was hardly known in England much before 1840 ; and nationalism, as the name of a political ideal, was hardly current in England before 1848, that is to say two years before the death of Wordsworth, at the age of 80. The second cause is that, when Mazzini became known in England he was naturally ready to hail with joy the name of any great English man of letters whom he could recognize as his own fore-runner. But, unfortunately in many ways, Mazzini found the English hero of nationalism, not in Wordsworth, but in Byron. For Byron's death at Missolonghi, in 1824, covered with oblivion his errors and his inconsistencies, and constituted him the martyr for the cause, not only of Greek freedom but generally of national independence. It is further certain that Wordsworth's anticipation of nationalist doctrine would not, during

<sup>1</sup> Swinburne, *Miscellanies*, p. 148.

Wordsworth's lifetime, be brought to the attention of Mazzini by most of his English friends. They were mainly to be found among Whigs and Radicals. But to English Whigs from 1830 to 1850, Wordsworth was a deserter from liberalism, who, frightened by the French Revolution, had in later life become an out-and-out Tory. No Radical, or only a very intelligent Radical such as John Stuart Mill, could be expected to recognize the love of freedom which never deserted Wordsworth; for Wordsworth had become the admitted opponent of the Roman Catholic Relief Act and of the Reform Act.

Fourth Question. How far did Wordsworth anticipate certain evil, or at any rate dubious, tendencies of nationalism which have been suggested, if not absolutely established, by experience acquired during the sixty-six years which have elapsed since his death?

Two of such dubious results are—the tendency of nationalism to break up, rather than to promote national unity, and—the possibility that nationalism may stimulate among the inhabitants of a given country an intense desire for national power, and thereby bring into existence a form of government which is hostile both to the personal liberty of its own subjects, and to the independence of other European States.

Nationalism and unity. In 1850 nationalism seemed to most English Liberals the means of promoting the political unity of countries, such as Italy or Germany, the inhabitants whereof felt themselves to be one nation, though they were, partly by the result of historical causes, partly by what one may call the devices of statesmanship, divided into separate States.<sup>1</sup> It happened

<sup>1</sup> Liberals between 1850 and 1860 were too much inclined to

too that, in Italy at any rate, national unity was indissolubly connected with the attainment of constitutional freedom and the expulsion of foreign rulers. It is perfectly natural therefore that Wordsworth should have avowedly desired the national unity both of Italy and of Germany. In this indeed he saw a good deal further than most Englishmen. Did he foresee that the desire for national unity might not only expel foreign rulers, but also tend to break up States which in happier circumstances might have become consolidated into one united nation? <sup>1</sup> One can give no precise answer to this question. Probably the possibility of such disruption hardly occurred to Wordsworth. Again one must always bear in mind that he was far more concerned with protecting or restoring the independence of actual nations than with reasserting the claim of nationalities to become separate nations.

Nationalism and the passion for national power. On this point Wordsworth showed a foresight which in 1917 appears all but prophetic. No man rated higher than himself the benefit of national independence. As has

assume that any large body of men who dwelling in one territory wished to separate from the State to which they politically belonged, and to become an independent nation, were *prima facie* in the right and suffered from some intolerable grievance under the government of the State of which they formed part. This easy-going belief in the right of rebellion received a shock from the outbreak of the War of Secession, and the best and most charitable excuse for Gladstone's publicly describing Jefferson Davis as the man who had made not only an army and a navy, but also a nation, is to be found in the plea that the English statesman, in the fervour of his nationalism, fancied that Jefferson Davis was labouring for the same object, namely national independence, which had enlisted the services of Mazzini and Cavour.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 91, 92, *ante*.



been already pointed out,<sup>1</sup> he dreaded the country whose military power should become irresistible, even though that country should be Great Britain. He also held, in this differing from most nationalists of the nineteenth century, that we ought to create a new balance of power,<sup>2</sup> and the very object of such balance of power was to make sure that no country should possess such unconquerable force as to menace the independence of any nation, however small. He had learned one of the most valuable of lessons from Napoleonic despotism. He knew that France herself, though in one sense the victim of despotism, was also the more or less willing supporter of a tyranny which flattered her national pride, whilst it served the personal ambition of her military leaders. Hence he was determined that 'we ought not to make peace with France, on any account, till she is humiliated, and her power brought within reasonable bounds. It is our duty and our interest to be at war with her.'<sup>3</sup> He had seen the frightful spectacle of a vast nation advancing with the rapid sweep of a horde of Tartars, moving with the impulse of savage instincts and at the same time furnished with all the arms provided by science and civilization.<sup>4</sup> He certainly was aware that a nation itself might become the most tremendous of tyrants.

Fifth Question. Was Wordsworth guilty of political apostasy?<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 89, 90, *ante*.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 90, *ante*.

<sup>3</sup> See *Tract*, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 116, *post*.

<sup>5</sup> See *An Examination of the Charge of Apostasy against Wordsworth*, by W. H. White (Mark Rutherford). A review of Harper's *William Wordsworth*, by C. Vaughan, in *Modern Language Review*, xi, pp. 491-6; Wordsworth, *Dict. Nat. Biog.* lxiii, p. 12. (Leslie Stephen.)

To obtain a fair answer to this question we must take into account several preliminary considerations.

It is, in the first place, unnecessary at this time of day even to discuss the charge that Wordsworth deserted the Whigs or any other party whatever, either because he was panic-struck by the Reign of Terror or because he gained thereby a handful of silver from the Tories. He was a man (as already pointed out)<sup>1</sup> of singularly calm judgement, and his opinions were less affected than those of his contemporaries by the horrors of the Revolution. He was absolutely incapable of giving up any principle, which he held to be sound, under the influence of private interests. It is a singular thing that a man of the genius and insight of Browning should, even when young, have written—

Just for a handful of silver he left us,  
Just for a riband to stick in his coat,

in verses supposed to apply to Wordsworth, and it is even more singular that Browning in later life, when apologizing for his youthful error, should have described the great poet as one 'whose defection, nevertheless, accompanied as it was by a regular face-about of his special party, was to my juvenile apprehension, and even mature consideration, an event to deplore'.<sup>2</sup>

We must, in the second place, recognize certain facts admitted by all competent critics as to Wordsworth's changes of opinion. As to his later years from 1815, Sir Leslie Stephen, a biographer of singular impartiality, and one intimately acquainted with Wordsworth's life and works, writes:

He had become respectable and conservative. To the Liberals he appeared to be a renegade. . . . Words-

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 8, 9, 51, 52, *ante*.

<sup>2</sup> Grosart, i, preface, p. xxxvii.

worth's 'Thanksgiving Ode' in 1815 . . . shows how completely he shared the conservative view. Although the evolution of Wordsworth's opinions was both honest and intelligible, it led to a practical alliance with toryism. He took a keen interest in local politics, as appears from his letters to Lord Lonsdale, . . . and in 1818 published two addresses to the Westmorland freeholders in support of the tory party. He was alarmed by the discontent of that period, and fully approved of the repressive measures. At a later period he was strongly opposed to catholic emancipation, and thought the Reform Bill would lead to a disastrous revolution. On 13 Jan., 1819, he was placed on the commission of the peace for Westmorland.<sup>1</sup>

To this rigidly fair description of Wordsworth's opinions after 1815 it is well to add one or two facts, which are apt to be forgotten. Wordsworth's position with regard to the war with France was throughout substantially consistent; it is well given in his own language:

'I disapproved of the war', he writes, in 1821, 'against France at its commencement, thinking—which was perhaps an error—that it might have been avoided; but after Buonaparte had violated the independence of Switzerland, my heart turned against him, and against the nation that could submit to be the instrument of such an outrage. Here it was that I parted, in feeling, from the Whigs, and to a certain degree united with their adversaries, who were free from the delusion (such I must ever regard it) of Mr. Fox and his party, that a safe and honourable peace was practicable with the French nation, and that an ambitious conqueror like Buonaparte could be softened down into a commercial rival.'<sup>2</sup>

The following words of subtle criticism are full of meaning; they point to an undoubted fact which no admirer of Wordsworth will deny:

Early in middle life a certain stiffness came over the

<sup>1</sup> *Dict. Nat. Biog.* lxiii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Knight, *Life of William Wordsworth*, 1889, iii. 58, 59.



whole being of Wordsworth ; and, . . . after his forty-fifth year, he was little accessible either to new ideas or to new forms of poetical inspiration. . . . Can we resist the conclusion that in this arrest of growth, so far as it existed, there were physical causes at work ? and that, if, with some notable exceptions, his creative impulse ceased at forty-five, that was because his physical frame, his vital energy, were early worn out ? The passionate life of his early years, the intense concentration of his creative period, would seem to have taken more out of him than he or others were aware of.<sup>1</sup>

And this indifference in regard to new ideas affected (one may add) not only his poetry but also his political judgement.

We must, in the third place, fully realize that our question resolves itself into two essentially different inquiries.

(1) *Did Wordsworth desert the Whigs ?*

Wordsworth never deserted the Whigs, for he had never been a Whig. In his youth he was a Republican, and, from 1802, for thirteen years at least, he had been the ally and the friend of Tories, with whom he agreed on the leading question of the day. He looked upon the Whigs as men who at the supreme crisis of England's fate had failed as a party in their duty to their country. He looked upon them much as most Englishmen to-day would look upon a body of men who were organized as a faction to agitate for immediate peace with the Kaiser, and who persisted in maintaining that the Kaiser was the one European monarch who was devoted to the cause of liberty, of justice, and of humanity. To unite with the Whigs was to Wordsworth an impossibility. But even when the death of Napoleon had finally disposed of the

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Language Review* (October, 1916), xi, p. 495.

remotest dread of Napoleonism threatening the liberty of mankind, there remained still, as has been well pointed out, a fundamental difference of feeling which inevitably divided Wordsworth from even those Whigs, such as Lord John Russell or Sydney Smith, who had agreed with him in advocating the war with Napoleon. 'The inner and spiritual life of the country, which to him was all important, to them counted for little or nothing.'<sup>1</sup> This difference cuts very deep; it was certain to develop itself in all sorts of different forms. The ideals of the Whigs were, many of them, such as Wordsworth could not possibly have accepted; they were hostile to the local liberties and the local traditions which he valued beyond all things. The Whigs cared for nothing in the life of the country but the development of its industries. The Benthamites, and in later days the Manchester School, were opposed to Wordsworth's ideals, and even in the matter of foreign policy, by the interpretation they put on the duty of non-intervention, went very near to denying the duty of England, which he had preached with so much fervour, to interpose for the protection of any small State whose independence was menaced by the gigantic power of some great and well-armed neighbour.<sup>2</sup> Nor must we forget a further

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Language Review*, xi, p. 492.

<sup>2</sup> The experience of later years shows the impossibility of reconciling the nationalism of Wordsworth (which enjoins the duty of protecting the independence of a small State, such as Belgium or Switzerland, against the aggression of a powerful neighbour) with the doctrine of non-intervention as advocated by the Manchester School. In truth the whole teaching of Cobden was divided from the statesmanship of Wordsworth by a far deeper difference. Of Cobden, no man ought to speak without the deepest respect; he rendered a great service to England, and was one of those few statesmen who tried always to base any policy he advocated on conclusions

consideration which justifies Wordsworth's retirement, at any rate after 1832, from any leading part in English politics. Statesmanship was not in any way his special vocation. At the very crisis of the deadly conflict between England and Napoleon he was driven by a prophetic impulse to lay before the people of his country the errors which had hindered their success in carrying on the war, to open to them the path of duty, and to convince them that it led to victory. The country at last, how far influenced by Wordsworth's energy no one can now say, adopted the policy he advocated in verse and in prose. The despot had been overthrown and transported to St. Helena. Wordsworth's prophetic task was performed ; his work was done. He naturally fell back upon his life's work as a poet. Even in a statesman it is thought laudable if he retires from active life at the moment when he feels that his appropriate task is finished. The same rule applies to a prophet and poet. The genius best suited for rousing the spirit of a great nation to the height of enthusiasm and courage required for the conduct of a desperate war, need not be at all fitted for guiding the nation in the path of sound economic reform.

logically deduced from premises which he held to be true. A passage, however, in Morley's *Life of Cobden* (vol. i. 130) has not received the attention that it deserves. In 1838 the great Free Trader believed that Prussia possessed the best government in Europe, and says, in so many words, 'I would gladly give up my taste for talking politics to secure such a state of things in England'. The passage is too long to quote, but Cobden's 'good word for beneficent absolutism' amounts to Pope's

For forms of government let fools contest  
What'er is best administered is best.

But this dogma of policy is as opposed to the whole spirit of Wordsworth as is the poetical doctrine and practice of Pope.



(2) *Did Wordsworth become indifferent to the cause of Nationalism?*

It is easy to dispose of the charge that Wordsworth was in any true sense a political renegade. There is more difficulty in meeting the assertion that, at any rate as early as 1825 or 1826, he had become indifferent to the cause of popular liberty and of nationalism. It is alleged that he had ceased as early as 1826 to take any interest whatever in the political events of the day, and that 'he had written heroically and divinely against the tyranny of Napoleon, but was quite indifferent to the successive tyrannies [e.g. in Spain] which disgraced the succeeding times'.<sup>1</sup> One would much like to know what was the element of truth in these allegations. A misunderstanding, as to Wordsworth's views of foreign policy in his later life, is the more natural because of the bona fide belief of Liberals, such as Crabb Robinson, that Wordsworth had in the field of domestic politics been something like a traitor. And this misunderstanding was liable to be increased by such a Liberal, of 1832, failing to note one feature in Wordsworth's nationalism to which I have already called attention. The doctrine he actually taught had far more reference to nations than to nationalities. Wordsworth always drew an immense distinction<sup>2</sup> between oppression imposed on a country

<sup>1</sup> See quotations from Crabb Robinson, Harper, ii. 338, 339. These give the strongest ground in support of this charge.

<sup>2</sup> 'The difference, between inbred oppression and that which is from without, is *essential*; inasmuch as the former does not exclude, from the minds of a people, the feeling of being self-governed; does not imply (as the latter does, when patiently submitted to) an abandonment of the first duty imposed by the faculty of reason.' *Tract*, pp. 167, 168, and compare pp. 158, 159. This in effect means

by a foreign power, and oppression arising from the misgovernment of a native King or tyrant. He was certainly, when attacking Napoleon, thinking much more of the duty of freeing Switzerland from tyranny imposed by the armies of France, than of delivering France itself from the despotic government of Napoleon. And the importance of this distinction was increased in his mind by the strong, probably the too vehement, belief in the certainty that a nation, so long as it was not ruled by foreigners, would in the end by its own natural vigour rid itself of every kind of bad government. This belief was certain to make Wordsworth more or less apathetic as regards the abolition of any tyranny which was not supported by any foreign power, and a man might detest the despotism of a Spanish King, and yet feel very doubtful about the expediency of expeditions of Englishmen from England (such as that in which John Stirling nearly took part) made with the object of assisting Spanish Liberals in a revolt against their tyrannical sovereign. Much too of Wordsworth's apathy may have been due, as already pointed out, to decline in physical energy.

There are, however, several facts which prove that the Liberal critics of Wordsworth may give us a most imperfect or one-sided view of his attitude towards the public life of his later years. It was natural that a man, who had in his youth seen face to face the violence of the revolutionary struggle in France, should have felt the danger of the Reform Act becoming the commencement of anarchy and revolution in England.

that tyranny imposed by a foreign power destroys a people, whilst domestic tyranny supported by part of the people is not nearly so destructive as foreign tyranny. See p. 86, *ante*.

Wordsworth could hardly have deceived himself into the delusion, entertained by most English Liberals, that the three glorious days of June had closed the French Revolution; and one who realized from French experience the difficulty of establishing really free government in a country where the mass of the population were Roman Catholics, might be excused for entertaining a doubt whether the Roman Catholic Relief Act, 1829, would not introduce new difficulties into the relations between England and Ireland. However this may be, it is worth while to adduce direct evidence that Wordsworth's interest in public affairs did not really die out during any part of his later life, and that he remained till near the day of his death far more the Wordsworth of his youth than between 1815 and 1850 was realized by the Whigs or the Liberals.

In 1831 J. S. Mill, then a young man of twenty-five, paid a visit to the Lakes and saw much of Wordsworth. He thus writes of the poet:

In the case of Wordsworth, I was particularly struck by several things. One was, the extensive range of his thoughts and the largeness and expansiveness of his feelings. This does not appear in his writings, especially in his poetry, where the contemplative part of his mind is the only part of it that appears; and one would be tempted to infer from the peculiar character of his poetry that real life and the active pursuits of men (except of farmers and other country people) did not interest him. The fact, however, is that these very subjects occupy the greater part of his thoughts, and he talks on no subject more instructively than on states of society and forms of government. Those who best know him seem to be most impressed with the catholic character of his ability. I have been told that Lockhart has said of him that he would have been an admirable country attorney. Now a man who could have been either Wordsworth or



a country attorney could certainly have been anything else which circumstances had led him to desire to be. The next thing that struck me was the extreme comprehensiveness and philosophic spirit which is in him. By these expressions I mean the direct antithesis of what the Germans most expressively call one-sidedness. Wordsworth seems always to know the pros and the cons of every question; and when you think he strikes the balance wrong it is only because you think he estimates erroneously some matter of fact. Hence all my differences with him, or with any other philosophic Tory, would be differences of matter-of-fact or detail, while my differences with the Radicals and the Utilitarians are differences of principle; for *these* see generally only one side of the subject, and in order to convince them you must put some entirely new idea into their heads, whereas Wordsworth has all the ideas there already, and you have only to discuss with him the 'how much', the more or less of weight which is to be attached to a certain cause or effect as compared with others: thus the difference with him turns upon a question of varying or fluctuating qualities, where what is *plus* in one age or country is *minus* in another, and the whole question is one of observation and testimony, and of the value of particular articles of evidence. I need hardly say to you that if one's own conclusions and his were at variance on every question which a minister or a Parliament could to-morrow be called upon to solve, his is nevertheless the mind with which one would be really in communion; our principles would be the same, and we should be like two travellers pursuing the same course on the opposite banks of a river. Then when you get Wordsworth on the subjects which are peculiarly his, such as the theory of his own art, if it be proper to call poetry an art, (that is, if art is to be defined as the expression or embodying in words or forms of the highest and most refined parts of nature), no one can converse with him without feeling that he has advanced that great subject beyond any other man, being probably the first person who ever combined, with such eminent success in the practice of the art, such high powers of generalization and habits of meditation on its principles.

Besides all this, he seems to me the best talker I ever heard (and I have heard several first-rate ones); and there is a benignity and kindliness about his whole demeanour which confirms what his poetry would lead one to expect, along with a perfect simplicity of character which is delightful in any one, but most of all in a person of first-rate intellect. You see I am somewhat enthusiastic on the subject of Wordsworth, having found him still more admirable and delightful a person on a nearer view than I had figured to myself from his writings, which is so seldom the case that it is impossible to see it without having one's faith in man greatly increased and being made greatly happier in consequence. I also was very much pleased with Wordsworth's family—at least, the female part of it. I am convinced that the proper place to see him is in his own kingdom—I call the whole of that mountain region his kingdom, as it will certainly be as much thought of hereafter by the people of Natchitoches or of Swan River, as Moenalus and the Cephissus, or Baiae and Soracte by ourselves, and this from the fortuitous circumstance that he was born there and lived there. I believe it was not there that you were acquainted with him, and therefore I am not telling you any old story in talking about the little palace or pavilion which he occupies in this poetic region, and which is, perhaps, the most delightful residence in point of situation in the whole country. The different views from it are a sort of abstract or abridgement of the whole Westmorland side of the mountains, and every spot visible from it has been immortalized in his poems. I was much pleased with the universality of his relish for all good poetry, however dissimilar to his own, and with the freedom and unaffected simplicity with which every person about him seemed to be in the habit of discussing and attacking any passage or poem in his own works which did not please them.<sup>1</sup>

Every word of this description is worth reading; it is by far the best portrait we have of Wordsworth in his fine old age. In 1837 Wordsworth travelled in Italy.

<sup>1</sup> Letters of J. S. Mill, i. 10-12.

This was a time when, as Swinburne has pointed out, the hopes of Italy had sunk low and the cause of Italian unity had not yet excited the romantic sympathy of Englishmen. Yet Wordsworth was true to his nationalism and, looking upon Rome from the Alban Hills, predicted the resurrection of Italy:

Forgive, illustrious Country! these deep sighs,  
Heaved less for thy bright plains and hills bestrown  
With monuments decayed or overthrown,  
For all that tottering stands or prostrate lies,  
Than for like scenes in moral vision shown,  
Ruin perceived for keener sympathies;  
Faith crushed, yet proud of weeds, her gaudy crown;  
Virtues laid low, and mouldering energies.  
Yet why prolong this mournful strain?—Fallen Power,  
Thy fortunes, twice exalted, might provoke  
Verse to glad notes prophetic of the hour  
When thou, uprisen, shalt break thy double yoke,  
And enter, with prompt aid from the Most High,  
On the third stage of thy great destiny.<sup>1</sup>

In 1846 Thomas Brown, the Chartist, and author of a poem 'The Purgatory of Suicides', when just out of prison for some form of sedition, called on Wordsworth. He was at once received; he was astounded and cheered by the dictum of the poet, 'You Chartists are right: you have a right to votes, only you take the wrong way to obtain them. You must avoid physical violence.' At the age of seventy-six the spirit of the old revolutionist and of the friend of the Girondins was still alive. He might not think much of the Whigs, but within four years of his death Wordsworth was certainly no Tory.

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 360, 361, and see especially Swinburne, *Miscellanies*, pp. 148, 149.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT WAR OF WORDSWORTH'S STATESMANSHIP

ENGLAND to-day stands in the same position in which she stood from 1803 to 1815: she is now, as then, engaged in a sacred war against armed and despotic Imperialism. This fact is better proved by one quotation than by twenty arguments:

It is... a frightful spectacle—to see the prime of a vast nation propelled out of their territory with the rapid sweep of a horde of Tartars; moving from the impulse of like savage instincts; and furnished, at the same time, with those implements of physical destruction which have been produced by science and civilization. Such are the motions of the French armies; unchecked by any thought which philosophy and the spirit of society, progressively humanizing, have called forth—to determine or regulate the application of the murderous and desolating apparatus with which by philosophy and science they have been provided. With a like perversion of things, and the same mischievous reconciliation of forces in their nature adverse, these revolutionary impulses and these appetites of barbarous (nay, what is far worse, of barbarised) men are embodied in a new frame of polity; which possesses the consistency of an ancient Government, without its embarrassments and weaknesses. And at the head of all is the mind of one man who acts avowedly upon the principle that every thing, which can be done safely by the supreme power of a state, may be done.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Tract*, p. 178.

This is the language of Wordsworth uttered in 1809. Change but one word and it describes the German despotism which it is our duty to destroy in 1917. We may learn from Wordsworth more than one lesson.

First. England needs beyond all things the practice of self-discipline. But this must take various forms.

We must try 'to do justice' in every sense of that term to Germany. We must, to achieve this end, cultivate a judicial habit of mind. We must encourage calmness of words, as well as of action and of judgement, in denouncing or dealing with the worst of public crimes. In this matter Wordsworth sets us the noblest example. There is not a word used by him with respect to Bonaparte and his despotism which lacks truth or dignity. He 'grieved for Bonaparte', and without recurrence to mere abuse draws from Napoleon's career the important lesson that the art of true government is not to be drawn from the experience of camps or battles, but from

Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk  
Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk  
Of the mind's business.<sup>1</sup>

But we must also remember that it is our duty to do justice (and it may be very stern justice), in the way of punishment, to Germany. Even when victory shall have been won, England will need the exercise of judicial firmness in order to obtain from Germany and her allies due reparation for the intolerable damage which they have inflicted upon Belgium, upon France, upon Russia, and upon every State which has struggled to resist the growth of German despotism. Judicial

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 304.

justice has nothing to do with good nature. The United Kingdom, supported by all the States that make up the British Empire, has suffered much at the hands of Germany, but the British Empire has suffered nothing like so much as have any of the States which have experienced the intolerable losses and wrongs arising from occupation by a German army. It is for the citizens of the British Empire to decide what reparation they see fit to claim for themselves. But neither England, nor any part of the British Empire, has a right to be lenient in respect, for example, of the outrages and the irreparable ruin which Germany has inflicted upon Belgium and France. We are all bound to keep in mind the details of German wrongdoing and to feel at the end of the war as indignant at the injuries which Belgium has suffered as we did when we first heard of these hitherto unparalleled outrages. Leniency to Germany means nothing less than a state of permanent insecurity for every independent nation on this side of the Atlantic.

Then again the vices or follies of England which called down Wordsworth's prophetic denunciations, all of them tended to interfere with the successful carrying on of the great war, that is with the performance of the most pressing of public duties. In this we should follow his teaching; we should set aside or check all luxury, amusement, or festivity which in any way jars with the mass of private grief that fills, not only the United Kingdom, but France, Belgium, Russia, Italy, Roumania, Germany, Austria, and we might say without exaggeration, every State of Europe, with personal mourning. It is hard indeed to believe that in the United Kingdom public races, connected as they are



with so much of indubitable evil, quite suit the circumstances of the present day. It is impossible for an ordinary Englishman to believe that, at any rate during the war, very drastic steps ought not to be taken for stopping or regulating the sale of intoxicating liquors. Any man can see that needful reform in this direction is surrounded by grave difficulties and possibly perils. But even persons who imbibed in early life the spirit of Mill's noble defence of individual liberty, now see that Mill's doctrine must receive very great limitations when applied to a state of war spreading throughout the greater part of the civilized world. Some forty years ago, or more, an eminent and deeply respected bishop of the Church of England had the boldness to lay down that he 'would rather see England free than sober'.<sup>1</sup> These words were a protest against certain forms of fanaticism, but they do not encourage, and were not meant to encourage, the conclusion that England ought to keep drunk even at the risk of thereby incurring at the hands of a tyrannical enemy a defeat in war which would deprive England both of independence and of freedom.

Secondly. England should pay due respect to nationalism.

England and her allies are discharging the solemn duty of destroying a new form of imperial despotism. This sacred war can attain its object only by assuring freedom and independence to every national State, great and small—e.g. Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden—throughout the length and breadth of Europe. We need, in Wordsworth's language, a 'new balance of power'.

Wordsworth clearly taught that England ought to

<sup>1</sup> See life of Bishop Magee, *Dict. Nat. Biog.* xxxv, 315-17.

protect or restore the independence of every existing nation, great or small. He also perceived, and in this he was in advance of his time, that the people of a country, such as Italy, which was divided into different States, might feel themselves to be in spirit one nation, and, being thus ripe for national unity, ought not to be hindered from obtaining it. But he did not lay down, since the time had hardly arrived for considering the question, any rule as to how far it was desirable or possible for England to stimulate the development of new nationalities, or the revival on historical grounds of nations which had long ceased to have a separate and independent existence. He certainly had no desire to rekindle throughout the civilized world feuds arising from mere differences of race or of language. He did not wish to destroy, on the ground of some ancient tradition of separate nationality, the real union of two politically united countries. He saw that England was under a much clearer duty to protect the independence of actual nations than to revive or to create nationalities. Is it not on the whole advisable that we should (subject always to the new circumstances and necessities of our own time) revert to Wordsworth's point of view, and, cherishing his nationalism, observe the limitations to which it is subject? The civilized world is now threatened with terrible danger through the rise of a State which scorns every tradition of humanity or of justice, and is possessed of inordinate military power. This consideration outweighs every other. We all know, we ought none of us for a moment to forget, the full meaning of this Wordsworthian precept:

When wickedness acknowledges no limit but the extent of her power, and advances with aggravated

impatience like a devouring fire; the only worthy or adequate opposition is—that of virtue submitting to no circumscription of her endeavours save that of her rights, and aspiring from the impulse of her own ethereal zeal. The Christian exhortation for the individual is here the precept for nations—‘Be ye therefore perfect; even as our Father, which is in Heaven, is perfect.’<sup>1</sup>

Thirdly. Our duty is—our aim ought to be—to employ the true means of liberty and virtue for the ends of liberty and virtue.<sup>2</sup>

This precept, given in the very words of Wordsworth, sounds oracular and enigmatic. But, if properly understood, it contains two valuable rules for the guidance of England during the present war.

This precept, in the first place, forbids that use of mere retaliation, which is constantly demanded by popular feeling, when Germany is guilty of any offence against the received rules of international law, or violates any ordinary regulation or custom which aims at mitigating the cruelty of war. Not many months have passed since we had reason to fear that the captain of a British merchant ship, who was made prisoner after a gallant resistance to the attack of a German submarine, would be executed in Germany as a criminal for a perfectly legal act of bravery and self-defence. Immediately the suggestion was made that, if this wrong were done, it might rightly be avenged by the execution in England of some German prisoner who had been guilty of no offence whatever. Yet such retaliation was open to some fatal objections. It would have sacrificed one legitimate object of the war, namely, the putting down and repressing the policy of adding

<sup>1</sup> See the *Tract*, pp. 188, 189.

<sup>2</sup> The *Tract*, p. 141.



new frightfulness to warfare. To imitate the conduct of criminals is not a happy way of repressing crime. The execution again in England of a German, innocent of any offence, solely because an Englishman, who has himself committed no offence, has been iniquitously executed in Germany, would be a shock to all ordinary ideas of justice. Test the matter by an extreme case. Suppose, what happily to us is inconceivable, that a British prisoner were tortured to death in Germany in order to add to the frightfulness of war. There is no man in England or in any civilized country who would not feel that, if Englishmen retaliated by torturing an innocent German to death, such retaliation must shock the moral judgement of the whole civilized world. I do not for a moment deny that cases may arise where it is hard to distinguish between retaliation and punishment. The essential difference is this: Retaliation is at bottom vengeance, whilst punishment ought to have for its object no gratification of vindictiveness but the repression of future offences, and certainly ought not to involve direct injury to persons who have committed no crime. Thus the time may well come when French armies shall be in possession, as French armies have been before, of Cologne. The mere fact that Rheims and its cathedral have been all but destroyed by German armies would not of itself, at any rate to a moralist such as Wordsworth, justify the destruction of Cologne and its cathedral. Vary, however, in a material matter the circumstances of the imagined case. Suppose that some parts of French territory were still in the occupation of German armies, and that the country so occupied by German soldiers contained cathedrals and buildings of high historic interest. In these circumstances it would

be a legitimate course for England and her allies to declare that, if any such cathedral or historical monument should be gratuitously damaged by the Germans, not a stone of Cologne's cathedral would be left standing. For punishment thus threatened and inflicted would tend to prevent the commission of crime.

Our precept, in the second place, enjoins that in a war carried on on behalf of liberty and virtue, we should pursue methods which on the whole are themselves conducive to these noble ends. This is a point on which it is desirable to insist, because at the present moment it is often forgotten. Many excellent persons, in their natural eagerness to gain a victory over Germany, assume that the mere fact that a custom, not in itself blameable, prevails in Germany is a strong *prima facie* argument for adopting or imitating it in England. This feeling contains of course a certain amount of truth, and, on that very account, is likely to exert too strong an influence ; people forget that practices borrowed from Germany may lower the virtues and, in the long run, diminish the power of England. Examples best show my meaning. Germany certainly has gained much in power, at any rate during war time, by the fact that under Prussian instruction she is becoming, or has become, a State constructed mainly with a view to success in war. But it seems, in modern England, for the moment to be forgotten that a great and civilized State exists at most times for the purpose of promoting peace and the true civilization, whereof the existence of peace is the essential condition. It is at the same time overlooked that individual liberty, lightly as it may be esteemed at the present day, has its own virtues and strength, no less than has militarism.

Even the present war has shown that when the United Kingdom is attacked by a foreign despot, every part of the British Empire—the great free State of the modern world—will rally round the defence of the United Kingdom, and if any one seeks for the secret source of the unity of the British Empire, it is possible to answer with confidence that the unity between Great Britain and her Dominions has been the creation of liberty. The loyalty of the Dominions has been due in the main to the now derided policy of—it takes some boldness to use the expression—*laissez faire*. My friend Godkin, a writer of rare ability, born and educated in the United Kingdom, exercised during his later life in the United States an influence—used for the best ends—greater than has often been attained there by any man not born and educated as an American citizen. He often maintained that Rome's triumphs in war were originally due to the admirable training of Romans in the civil virtues of citizenship. This paradox, which was constantly attacked by one at least of my friend's audience, has seemed to me in later years to contain a vital truth. Even in war, the freedom of England, though it has betrayed some English weaknesses, has also performed miracles of power. The 'contemptible little army' was from the moment it crossed to the Continent found to be a force which no foe dared despise, and has grown with marvellous rapidity into a host numbered by millions. We may easily admit that Englishmen when the war began had much to learn from Germany. But we must also remember that the individuality, and the personal liberty of England may still teach a number of valuable lessons to some militarized States of the Continent. Is



there any man of sense who believes that even the severe discipline of Prussian armies, admirable though in many respects it may be, might not, if it could be imposed upon British soldiers, produce more of loss than of gain? It has not always been a simple advantage even to Germans. The army that marched to Jena inherited the traditions and the training of Frederick the Great. It was believed, not only by Germans but by many foreign critics, to be the finest body of soldiers existing in Europe. At Jena the German army was completely beaten. This is comparatively nothing, for the armies, even of Rome, suffered many defeats. The important matter is that the German army was for the moment panic-struck, though it consisted of officers and men as full of personal courage as are their descendants of to-day. Nor is this panic strange. Soldiers trained to be part of a great machine are often perplexed and confused when the machine is damaged or broken up. Any training, further, which diminished the hearty goodwill between our officers and soldiers might well be purchased at too high a price. So also might any discipline which taught men strictly to obey orders, but did not leave them enough of individuality to act for themselves when no orders came. What every one must be anxious to secure is that we should not, in the legitimate desire to free Englishmen from some recognized defects, forget that freedom with all its possible errors, has on the whole been the source of English greatness, and has been the spirit which has built up the British Empire. It is as certain as anything can be which concerns the future, that, even when the war comes to an end, the United Kingdom, and indeed the British Empire, may well have for years to maintain military

forces which will seem gigantic if compared with the armies supported by England during the greater part of the nineteenth century. One may hope that military training may become part of the education of every Englishman. But one may also hope that, while the training shall be universal, a great element of free enlistment, at any rate for service abroad, may form part of our military system.

It is easier, however, to realize the essential value of Wordsworth's precept that for the attainment of the ends of virtue (e.g. victory in a just war) we should employ the means of liberty and virtue, if we look for a moment away from England and consider the position of modern France. France is by historical tradition the leading military State of modern Europe. Within the last 130 years, or so, French armies have entered in triumph almost every capital in Europe, except Petrograd and London. But France, though the land of great generals and triumphant armies, has under the *ancien régime* no less than since the great Revolution, been a country of active, civil life. She has been a military country, but has not been militarized. Yet France is the country of revivals and resurrections. The French nation and the French army have now become identified with each other. Civilians and soldiers have, so to speak, combined their virtues. French bravery has united itself with French patience. Men are still living who can remember when just after the Crimean War we were told everywhere that they did things better in France. Now we are told that they do things much better in Germany. Neither saying could be wholly true. But it is well worth while to remember that the free spirit of France has something to teach mankind quite as impor-

tant as the lessons to be learned from the military discipline blended with the scientific training of Germany. Would any man in his senses suggest that, even in military matters, Frenchmen would do well to follow in everything the example of Germany? We all see now that though France trains every Frenchman for the army, still France is not a militarized nation, and yet France has produced an army which, except in respect of numbers, can meet the armies of Germany on at least equal, and we might well say, looking at Verdun, on more than equal terms. With Frenchmen military capacity has not destroyed or deadened civil virtues. Though the spirit of France differs in some respects from that of England, yet in both countries freedom is held an essential element of progress. In France, as in England, no servile stupefaction at the successes gained by German despotism should induce free men to forget that they must prefer where possible those methods even of warfare which conduce to the ends not only of virtue but of liberty.

Fourthly. Englishmen should in this time of war fulfil the duty of hope.

This duty cannot possibly be explained in language more impressive than Wordsworth's own—

Here pause: the poet claims at least this praise,  
That virtuous Liberty hath been the scope  
Of his pure song, which did not shrink from hope,  
In the worst moment of these evil days;  
From hope, the paramount *duty* that Heaven lays,  
For its own honour, on man's suffering heart.  
Never may from our souls one truth depart—  
That an accursed thing it is to gaze  
On prosperous tyrants with a dazzled eye;  
Nor—touched with due abhorrence of *their* guilt  
For whose dire ends tears flow, and blood is spilt,



And justice labours in extremity—  
 Forget thy weakness, upon which is built,  
 O wretched man, the throne of tyranny! (1811.)<sup>1</sup>

Wordsworth himself makes it his first title to fame as a poet and a patriot that he never shrunk from hope in the worst moment of those evil days of Napoleon's glory, and he links hope with the love of virtuous liberty and with a solemn curse on those who gazed on prosperous tyrants with a dazzled eye. And he is assuredly right. From the years between the Peace of Amiens to the battle of Waterloo (1802-1815) the one thing needed by all Englishmen was the hope which is an absolute necessity for the maintenance of national strength.<sup>2</sup> And Wordsworth has shown his deep insight into human nature by terming hope neither a pleasure nor a relief, but the paramount *duty* that Heaven lays for its own honour on man's suffering heart. Herein he differs from most religious preachers even at their best. They have often attempted to guide men into paths of righteousness by an appeal to their fears, whilst Wordsworth appeals to the most sacred hope. That the duty of hope was difficult to perform during the Napoleonic wars is certain. It is at this moment, in spite of many encouragements, as arduous a duty as it was during the triumph of Napoleon. It is possible that we may have to practise this duty more and more carefully as year follows year. No one can say how long the war will last. It is clear that each party to this terrible conflict has found the strength of his opponent greatly beyond what seemed reasonable expectation. One may venture to say that one reason why the United Kingdom and the firmly allied Dominions have not achieved all that

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 321.

<sup>2</sup> See Scott's language, p. 75, *ante*.

could have been expected is that they have not fully recognized that hope is a duty. It would be an immense satisfaction could I entertain the hope, wild as it certainly is, of leading the majority of civilians, whether men or women, who inhabit Great Britain and Ireland, to read and ponder upon this splendid sonnet. The spirit of it ought to put an end to much abject fear. It ought to make each one of us see to doing our own duty to the country and make us dismiss a lot of futile criticism upon the methods adopted for the conduct of the war, by men who, whatever their defects, and to whatever party they belong, are really compelled, by the force at once of the most common patriotism and also of the most obvious ambition, to do the very best they can to ensure the victory for which every loyal British subject hopes and prays. A little more of the spirit of rational hope, which must certainly inspire us with unlimited confidence in the bravery and the skill of our sailors, would have averted the ridiculous, but at the same time most lamentable, mistake under which the British public, influenced by an ambiguous telegram with regard to the battle of Jutland, mistook a glorious victory for an unhappy defeat. Let every civilian throughout the United Kingdom try to practise in all its different forms this one paramount duty. There is no need to appeal either to our soldiers or our sailors. In every rank of the Navy and Army the high spirits of officers and men are as notorious as their courage.

Fifthly. England and her Allies must reject every peace which is not based on complete victory.

There must be no second Peace of Amiens, and this for two reasons. An imperfect peace means to England complete failure, and failure means the ruin of England

and the British Empire. An imperfect peace means, in the second place, the condemnation of the War. Such a peace must in fact, if not in name, fall short of that destruction of German despotism which alone justifies the sufferings caused by this world-wide war. It were well if the Allies should publish the declaration that they will not even look at any proposals of peace from Germany till she has at least withdrawn from Belgium.

All talk about terms of peace and all schemes for federating the world are at present out of place; they are worse than vain; they may do untold harm; they divert men from the true duty before them. England and her Allies are not called upon at this moment to form policies for creating a new or a better world, they are called upon to punish and guard against crimes which, if they meet with no penalty, will throw the hardly won civilization of Europe back into barbarism. We are here following the teaching and the example of Wordsworth. He does not dream of some moral millennium, he does not frame wild schemes for securing perpetual peace; he is no pacifist.

The nation would err grievously, if she suffered the abuse which other states have made of military power, to prevent her from perceiving that no people ever was, or can be, independent, free, or secure, much less great, in any application of the word, without martial propensities, and an assiduous cultivation of military virtues.<sup>1</sup>

In his statesmanship, as in his poetry, Wordsworth's eyes were always fixed upon fact. He preached in season and out of season, in poetry no less than in prose, that in his day the one duty of England was to deliver the world from Napoleonic despotism. He, being dead, yet

<sup>1</sup> Advertisement to *Thanksgiving Ode*, January 18, 1816.



speaketh. He tells us that our duty to-day is to deliver the world from the far more brutal and the far more dangerous despotism of the Kaiser.

To any man of even ordinary humanity, there is something terrible in the suggestion that proposals of peace should in any circumstances be declined. But the first duty of any one, however insignificant or unknown, who offers counsel with regard to the War is to tell, with the utmost plainness, the truth as he sees it. It is, however, a comfort to any writer if he is able to express his conclusions in the words of men far better known than himself, and of larger experience, and, it may be, of more impartiality than he can claim for himself. Let me urge upon the attention of my readers the words of three men who have spoken with authority. Hear first the language of a French premier. His words were spoken more than a year ago, but they represent the spirit of the French people. They represent the spirit of the soldiers who, at the Battle of the Marne, drove back from Paris German armies which counted with confidence on immediately entering into the capital of France. They represent too the spirit of the soldiers who later, after a battle measured not by days but by months, compelled the best troops of Germany to sacrifice every hope of capturing Verdun.

We are convinced of victory, which will be the victory of justice. We want Europe liberated, Belgium free. We want the restitution of the lost provinces and the crushing of Prussian militarism, for the peace of the world is irreconcilable with its bloody caprices.<sup>1</sup>

Next read the declaration of my friend Lord Bryce, who has acquired a wider political knowledge of all

<sup>1</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 13, 1915.

countries throughout the world than any living Englishman :

If there was anything upon which public opinion in this country and, he thought, in the neutral world was absolutely agreed, it was that those who had brought the evil in Belgium, destroyed its cities, and inflicted poverty and hardship on its people, ought to be made to pay to the uttermost farthing for the mischief they had done.<sup>1</sup>

Hear lastly the opinion of my friend, Dr. Eliot, ex-President of Harvard University. It was given at a meeting of Baptist ministers in Boston. He speaks with the authority due to a life spent in successful devotion to the service of his country. He speaks also with an impartiality not to be claimed by any Englishman. Dr. Eliot said :

Do not pray for peace now. I cannot conceive a worse catastrophe for the human race than peace in Europe now. If it were declared now, Germany would be in possession of Belgium, and German aggressive militarism would have triumphed. That would be a success for Germany after she had committed the greatest crime a nation can commit—namely, faithlessness to treaty rights—and the sanctity of contracts would pass for nothing, and civilization would be set back for centuries. I do not see how any thinking American can keep himself neutral. Liberty and every other American ideal are involved in this war.<sup>2</sup>

Asked when ministers might begin to pray for peace, Dr. Eliot said, ' When Germany is driven back into her own territory and forced to pay full indemnity to Belgium '.

These counsels deserve the deepest attention. They have but one defect. They are given by men of to-day,

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, April 8, 1915, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, April 14, 1915.

but no man, however great his wisdom and experience, can escape altogether from the influence, and therefore from the errors, of his time. We should like to consult the true prophets of an era resembling, but not identical with, the present age. No man for our purpose more nearly meets our wants than Wordsworth, and even he exhibits more of true prophetic inspiration in his patriotic sonnets than elsewhere. His celebrated *Tract* indeed contains, as I hope to have shown, much wisdom and statesmanship which is applicable to the present day. But it is in part occupied with transitory matters which have lost most of their importance. The patriotic sonnets are written with the absolute confidence of inspired certainty. They reprove Englishmen for their English faults; they contain much less about the vices of England's enemies than about the errors, the crimes it may be, which have hindered England's success in war. They appeal to the inherited and the historical virtues handed down to us by men of heroic mould whom it is our duty to follow. There is not in Wordsworth's patriotic admonitions, and even in his sublime trust that the victory of England's cause is certain because it is the cause of righteousness, a line which even the most perverse ingenuity can treat as flattering the self-love of his countrymen. If England is praised it is not the England of Wordsworth's day. He never lets the men he addresses forget that they have often fallen below the high standard of patriotism set them by their ancestors. He gives new strength to Englishmen by recalling to them two things which in time of misfortune men are too apt to forget. The one is the paramount duty of cherishing a noble hopefulness, the other is the terrible thought—a thought none of

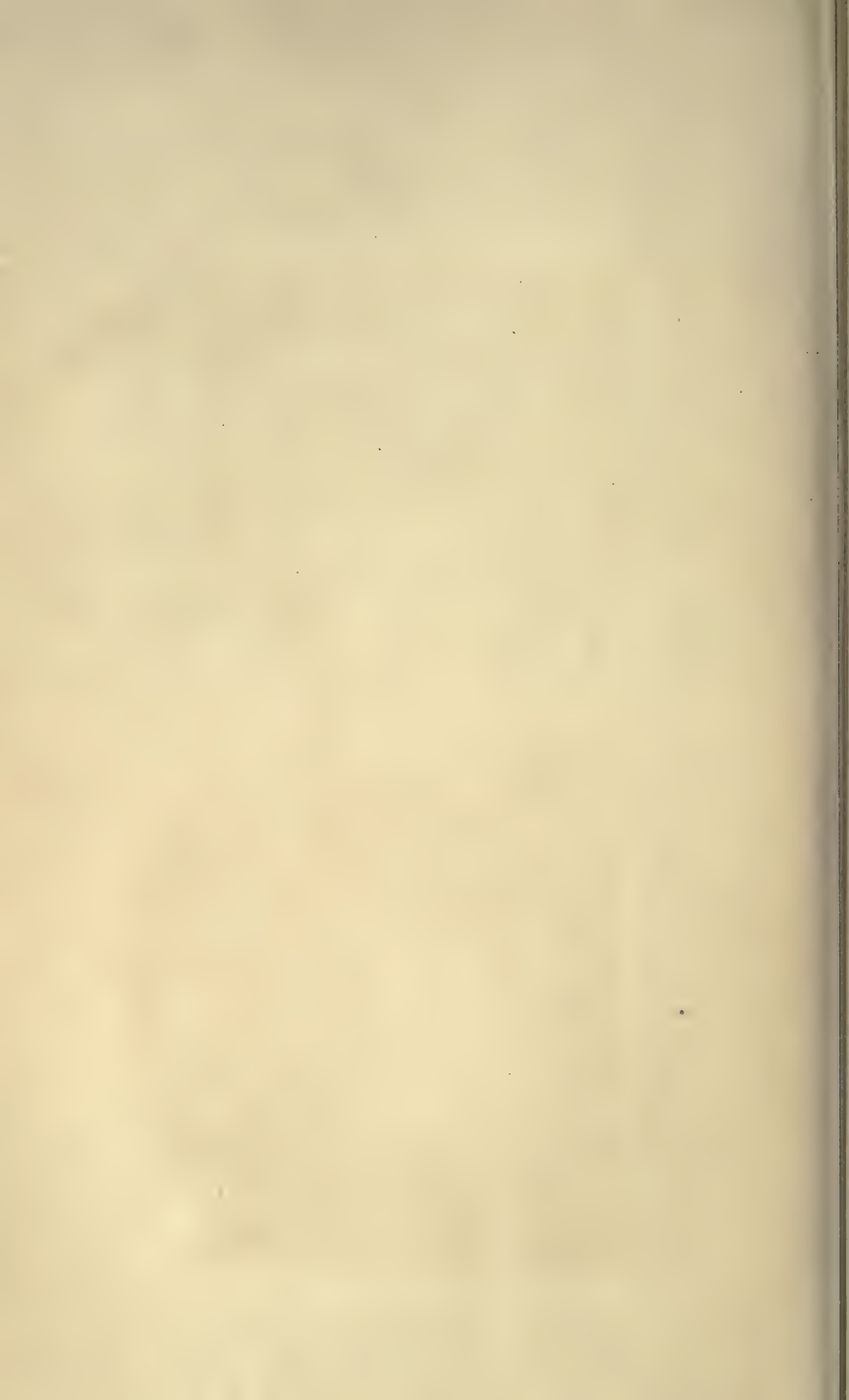


us ought ever during the continuance of this war to forget—that our failure to fulfil to the utmost the full duty of citizens, and thus make certain of victory in a just cause, will bring upon us the disgrace of having sullied the inherited glory and sacrificed the inherited freedom of England.

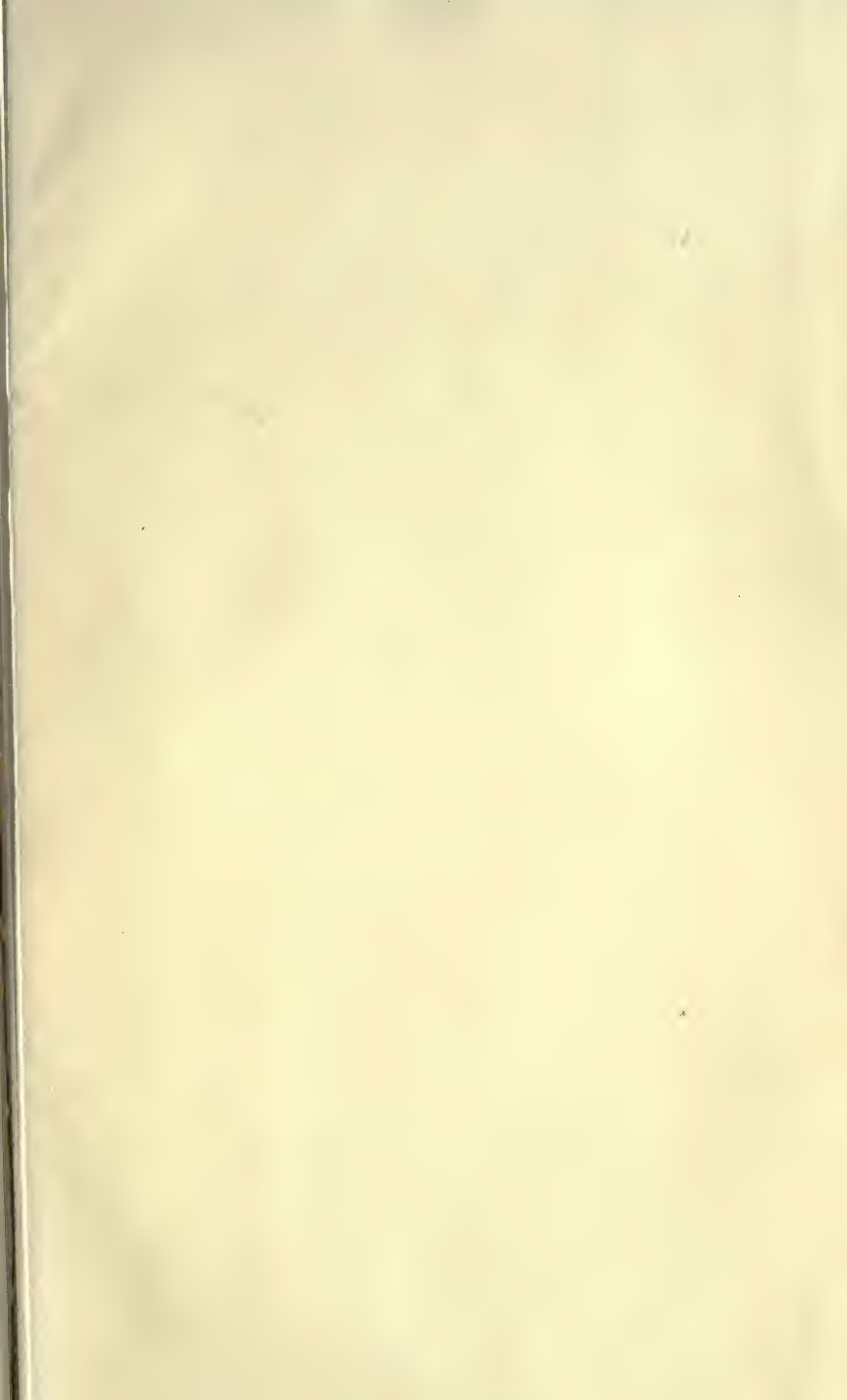
It is not to be thought of that the Flood  
Of British freedom, which, to the open sea  
Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity  
Hath flowed, 'with pomp of waters, unwithstood,'  
Roused though it be full often to a mood  
Which spurns the check of salutary bands,  
That this most famous Stream in bogs and sands  
Should perish; and to evil and to good  
Be lost for ever. In our halls is hung  
Armoury of the invincible Knights of old:  
We must be free or die, who speak the tongue  
That Shakespeare spake; and faith and morals hold  
Which Milton held.—In everything we are sprung  
Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold.<sup>1</sup>

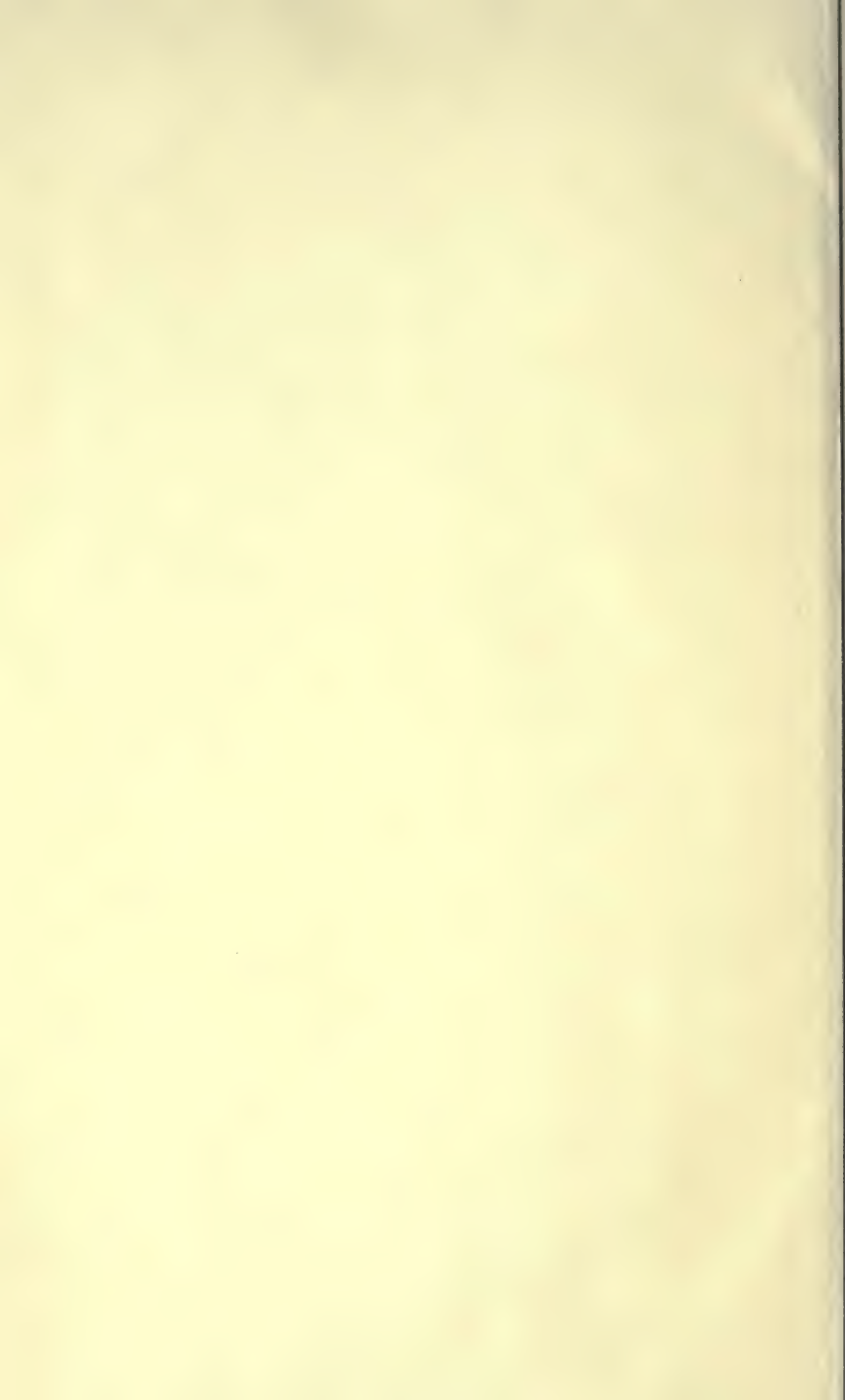
<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, p. 307.

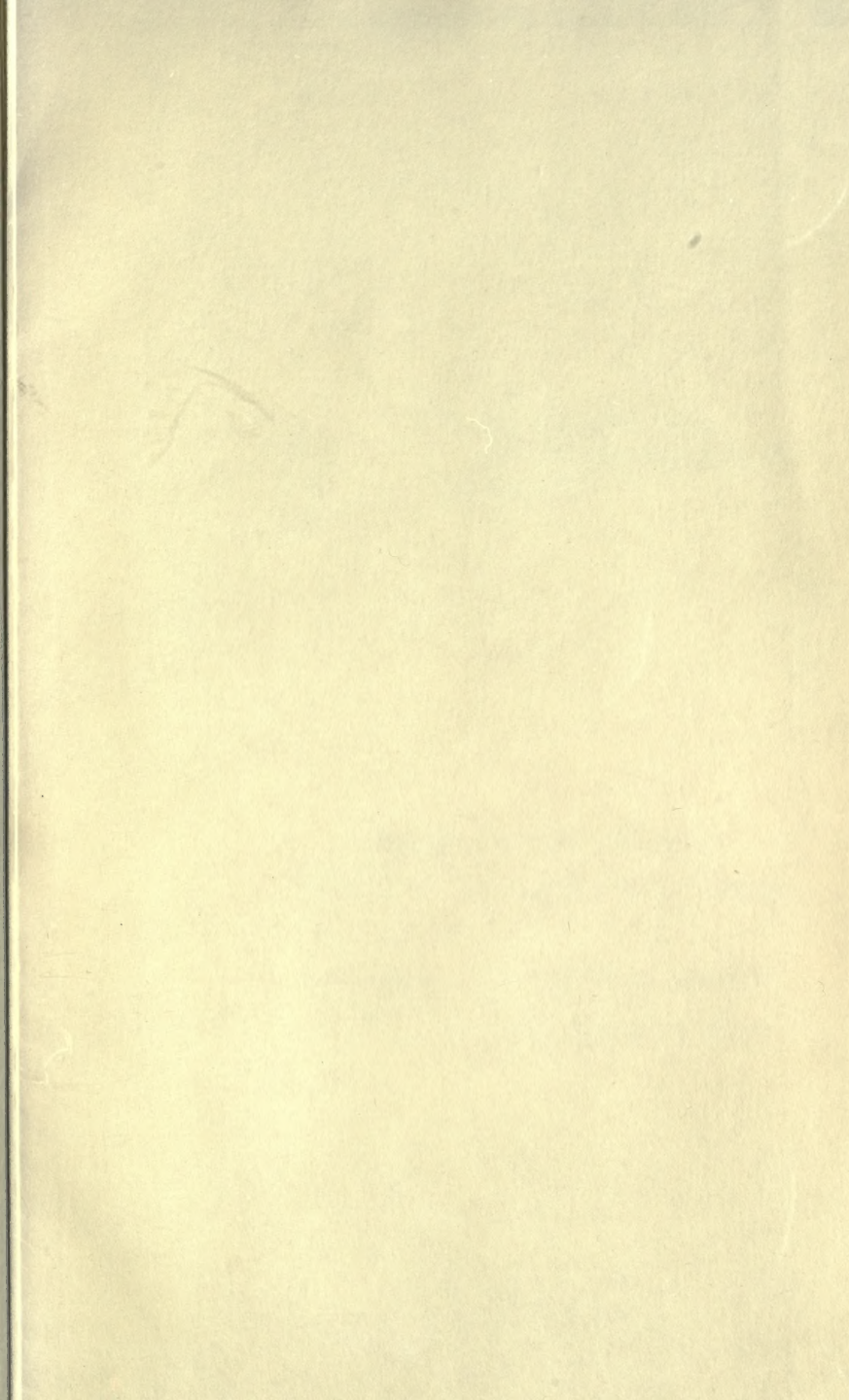
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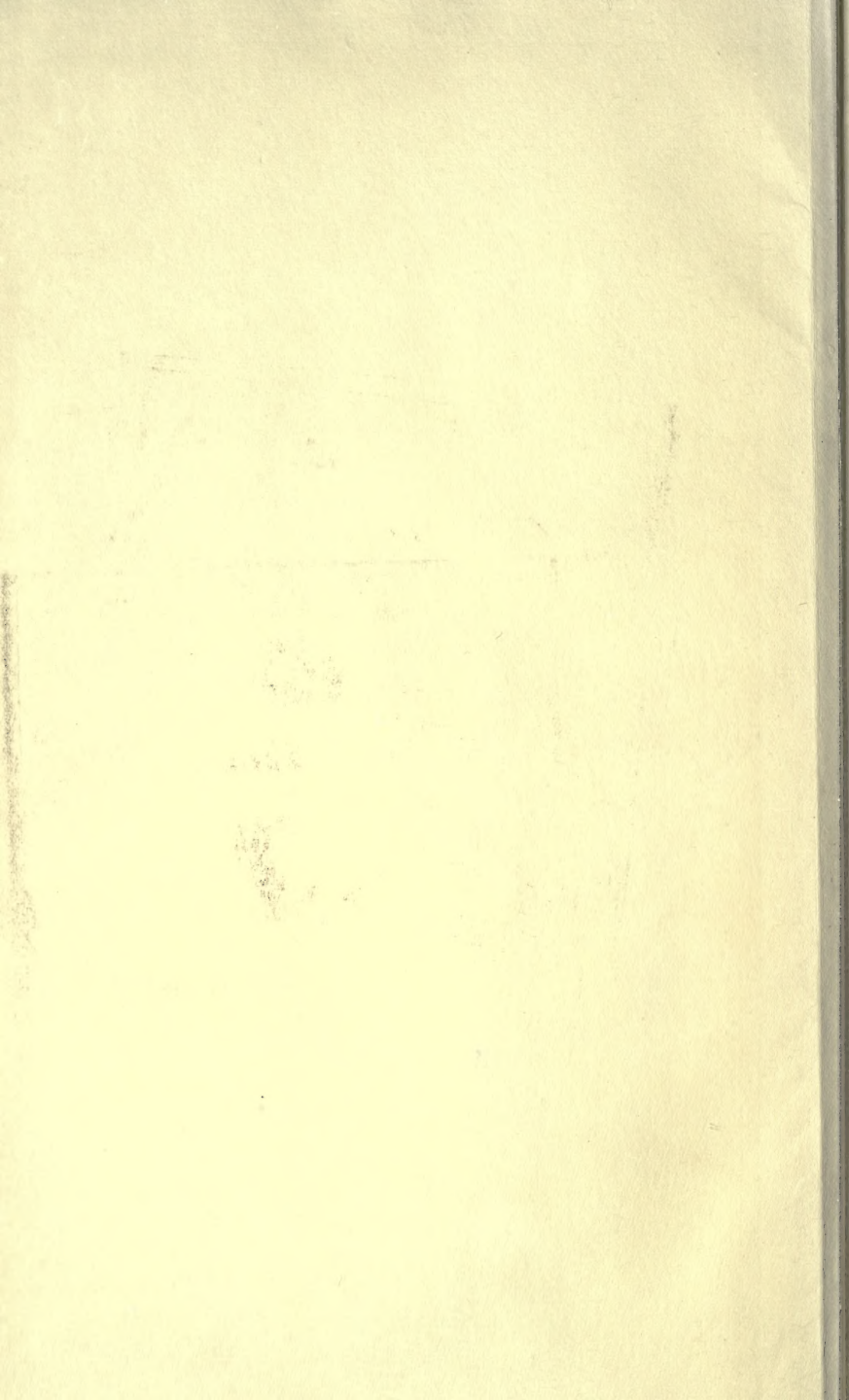












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